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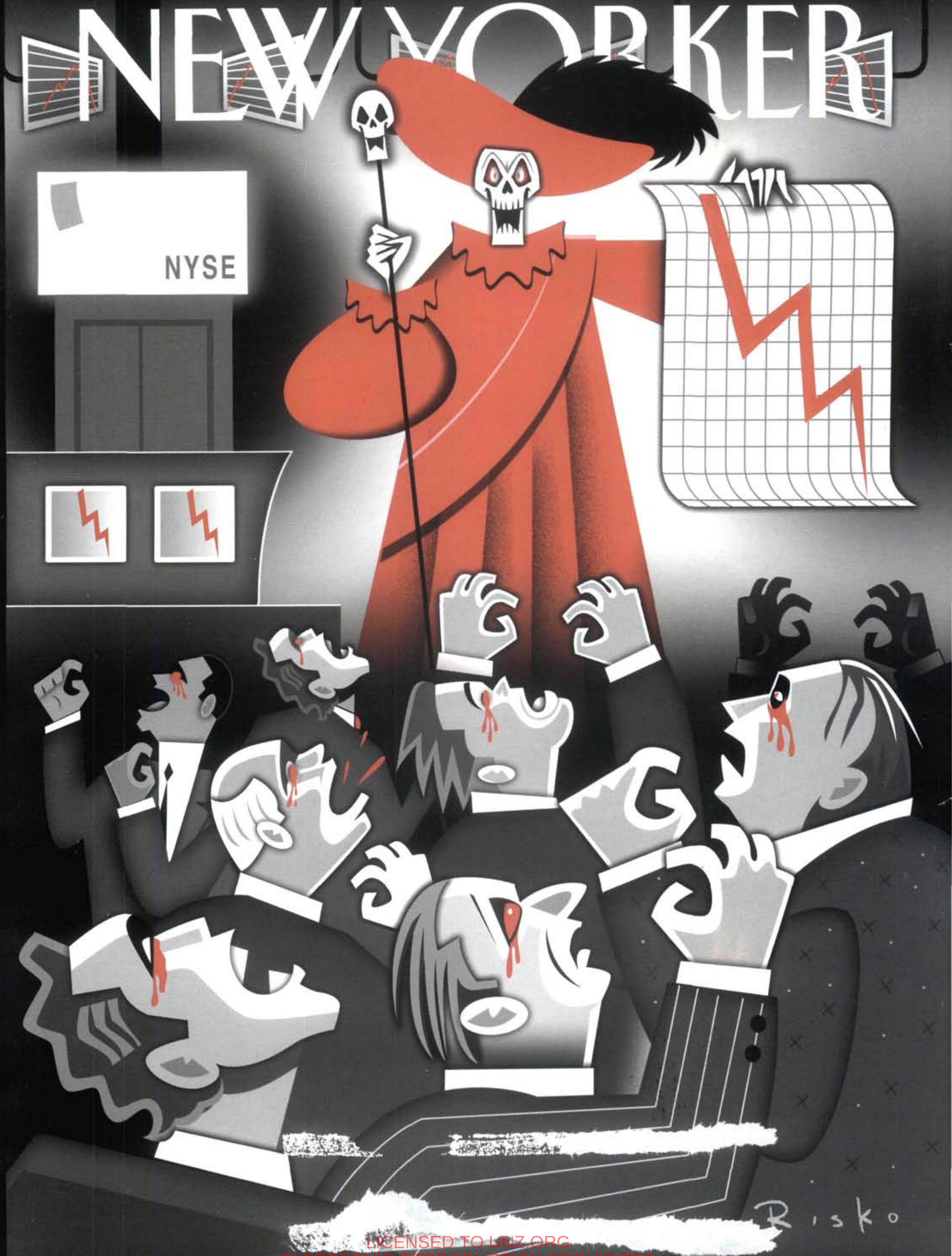

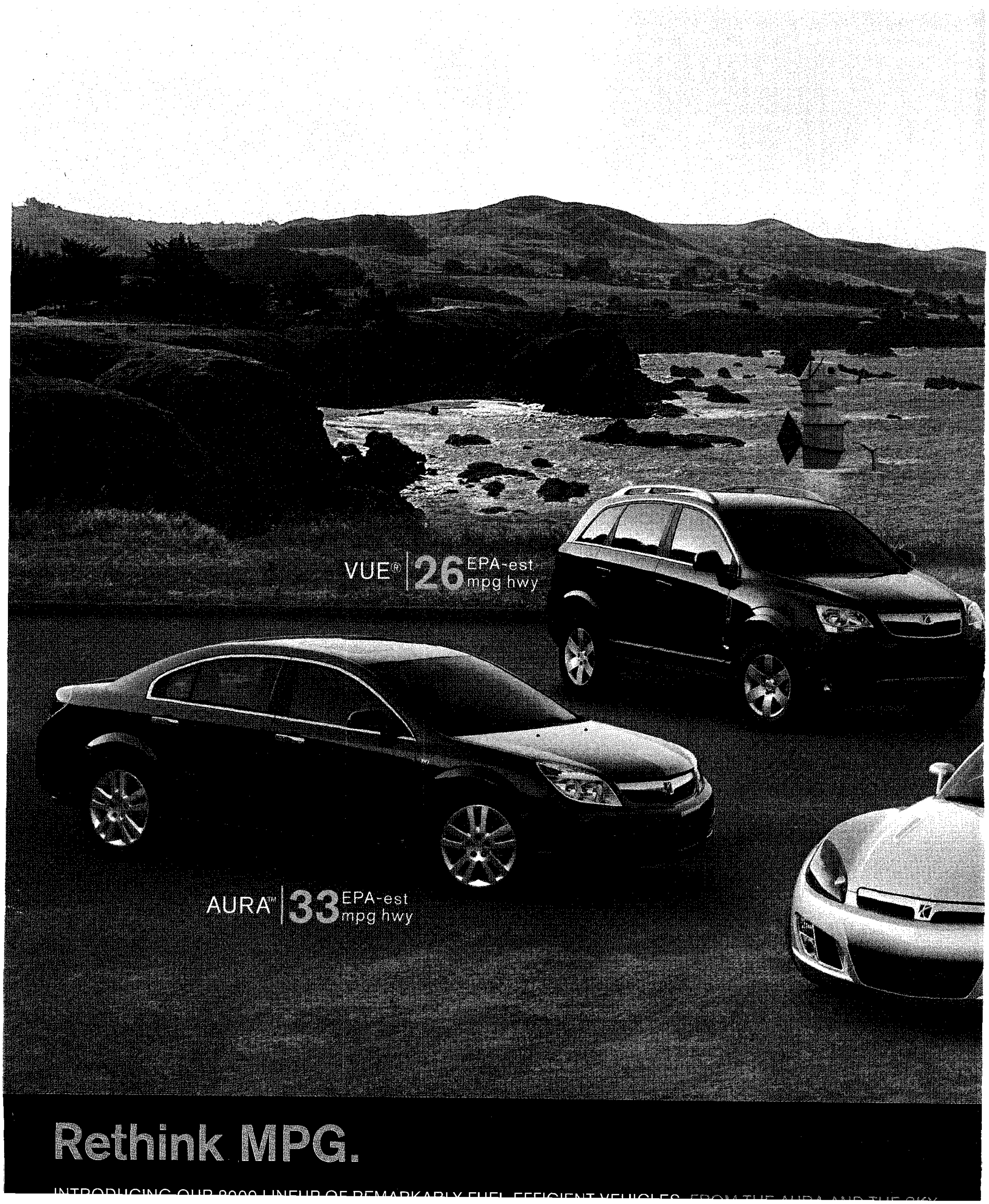
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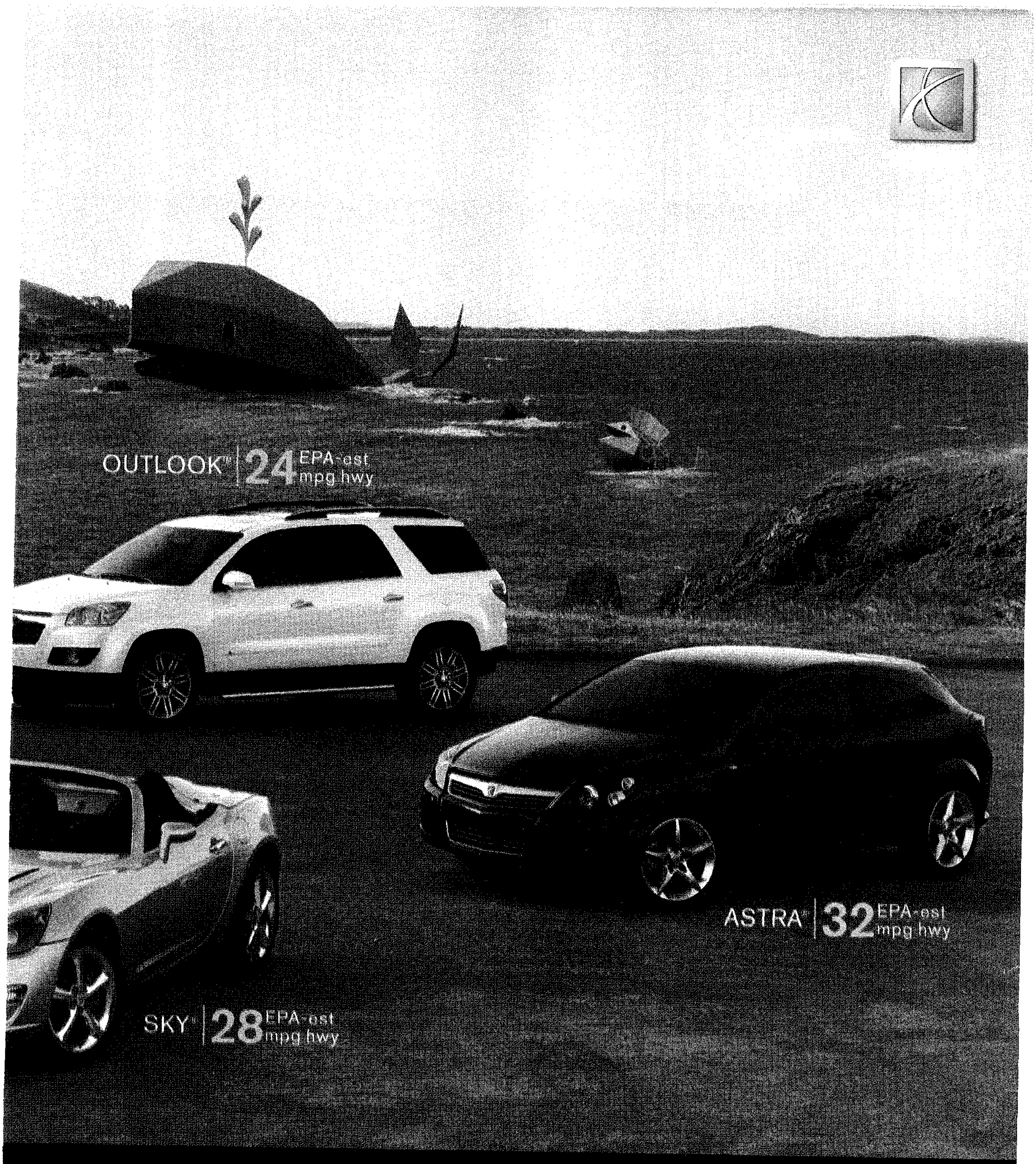
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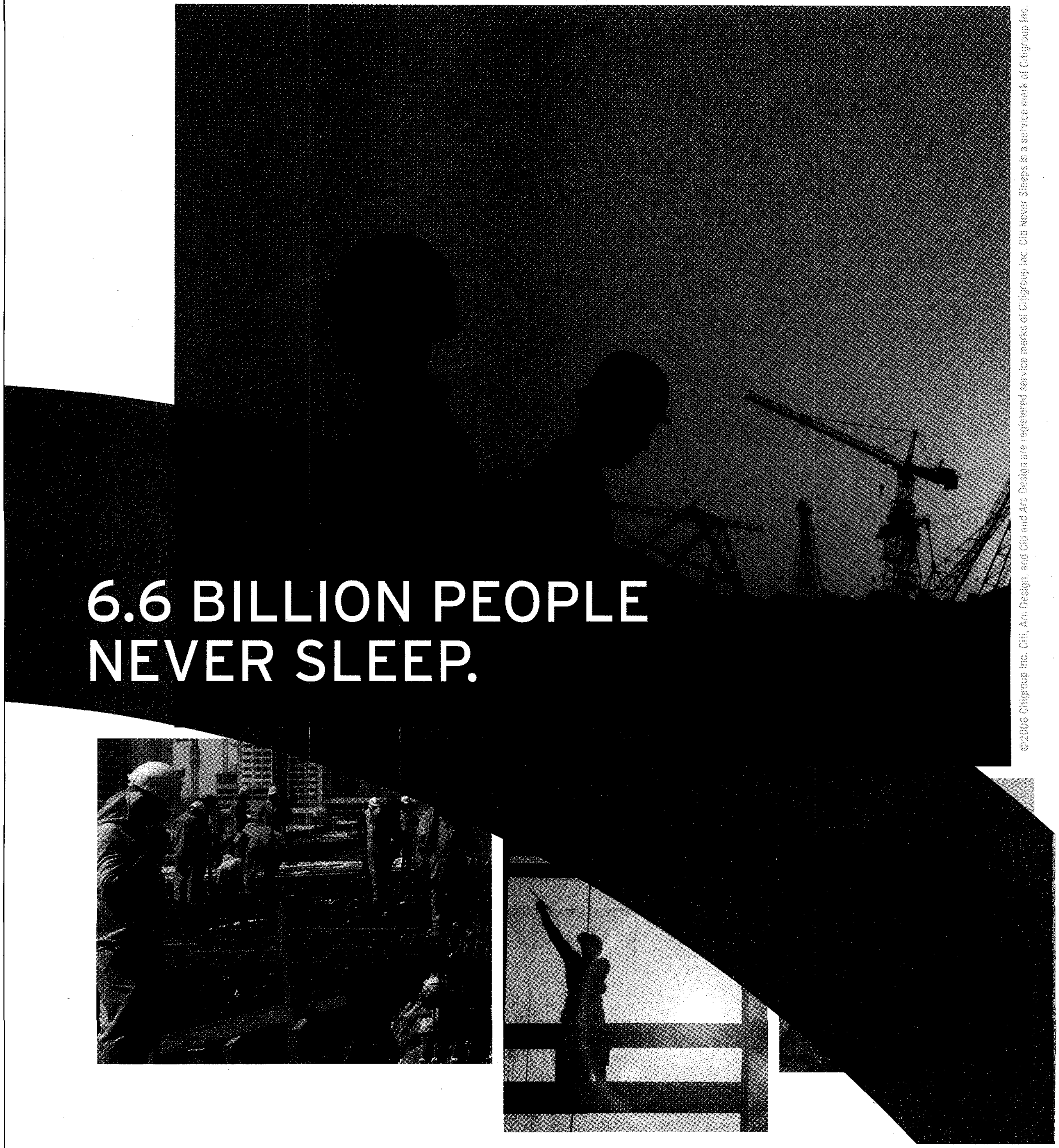
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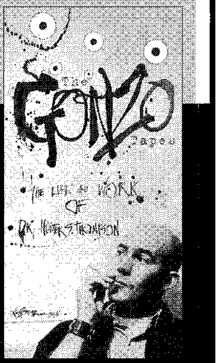

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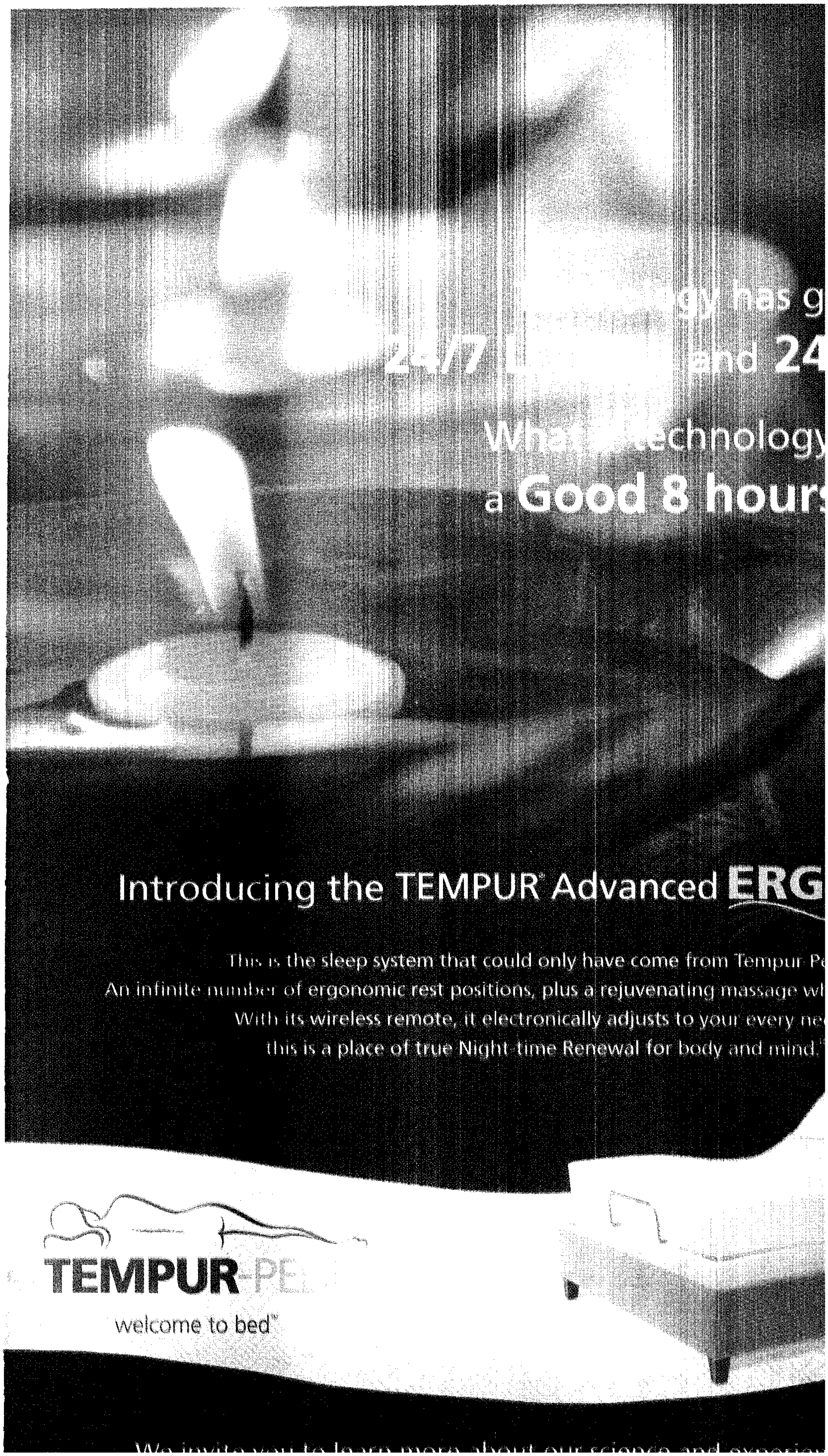

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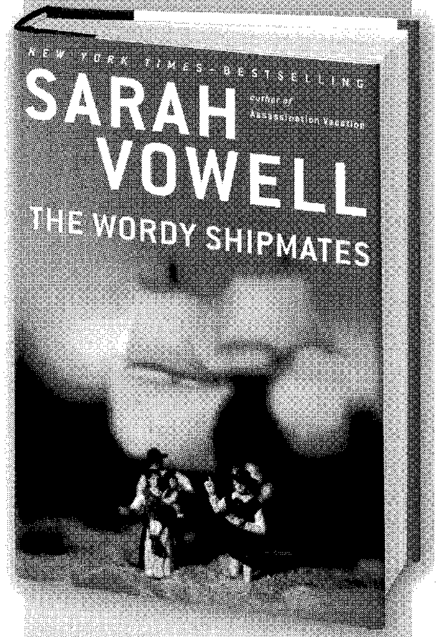

Turns out
there was
more to the
Puritans than
shoe buckles
and corn.

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CONTRIBUTORS

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Hendrik Hertzberg (Comment, p. 29) writes regularly about politics and policy, and has a blog on newyorker.com. He is the author of "Politics: Observations & Arguments."

John Updike ("A Desert Encounter," p. 45) has a new novel, "The Widows of Eastwick," coming out this month.

Ryan Lizza ("Biden's Brief," p. 48) is the Washington correspondent for the magazine.

Lillian Ross (The Talk of the Town, p. 34), a longtime staff member, has been writing for The Talk of the Town for six decades.

Frederick Seidel (Poem, p. 58) has published twelve books of poems, including "Ooga-Booga." His next collection, "Poems: 1959-2009," comes out in the spring.

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Dana Goodyear (The Talk of the Town, p. 32; "Zen Master," p. 66), a staff writer, is the author of the poetry collection "Honey and Junk."

Roddy Doyle (Fiction, p. 76) published a collection of short stories, "The Deportees: and Other Stories," in January.

Elizabeth Kolbert (Books, p. 88) is the author of "Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change."

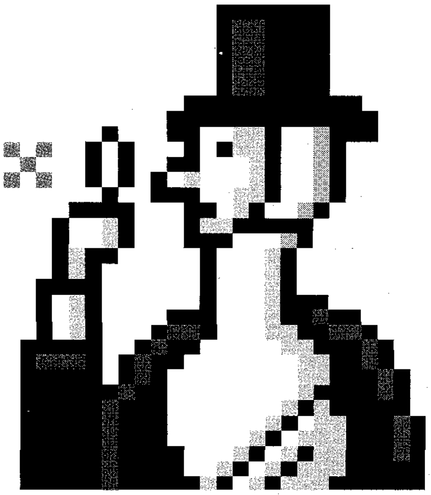
Donald Hall (Poem, p. 90) was the United States Poet Laureate in 2006-07. "Unpacking the Boxes: A Memoir of a Life in Poetry" came out in September.

Jeffrey Frank (Books, p. 94) is a senior editor at *The New Yorker* and the author of the novels "The Columnist," "Bad Publicity," and "Trudy Hopedale."

Joan Acocella (Dancing, p. 96) reviews books and dance for the magazine. "Twenty-eight Artists and Two Saints" is her most recent book, and is available in paperback.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Hendrik Hertzberg blogs the run-up to the election, and joins *Ryan Lizza* and *Dorothy Wickenden* on the Campaign Trail podcast. / More audio: *Malcolm Gladwell* discusses late bloomers, and *Gary Shteyngart* reads a short story by *Andrea Lee.* / Ask the Author: submit questions for *Malcolm Gladwell.* / Video from The New Yorker Festival. / The Book Bench, the Cartoon Lounge, Goings On, and blogs by *George Packer, Steve Coll,* and *Sasha Frere-Jones.* / From the archives: *Dorothy Parker* on Emily Post. / Animated cartoons and the caption contest, now with a browsable archive.



THE MAIL

SPOOKED

I have long admired John le Carré's ability to explore the fascinating, mysterious world of spies by telling stories steeped in the internal and interpersonal drama of the human condition ("The Madness of Spies," September 29th). What I found extraordinary about his piece was the ease with which he ties our recent madness—in Iraq and in the war on terror—to the Cold War era. He clarifies what our public discourse works so hard to hide, deny, or ignore: that our national-security leadership is intoxicated with the comic-book romance of violence, especially of the covert-ops variety. Jack Bauer-style derring-do, which has won out over deliberate and painstaking attempts at understanding the world we actually inhabit, will continue to lead us down the tragic road that winds through Baghdad, Kabul, and Islamabad. The ensuing mayhem and misery must eventually wash up on our shores.
Lee McManus
Culver City, Calif.

A CRITIC, A TEACHER

Louis Menand captures Lionel Trilling with a nimbleness that the professor doubtless would have both detested and admired (A Critic at Large, September 29th). However, though Trilling didn't like graduate students or literary pedantry, he engaged undergraduates in his seminars wholeheartedly. I was lucky enough to be in a yearlong senior seminar that Trilling taught in 1968-69, as he prepared the lectures that were later collected in "Sincerity and Authenticity." He told us that we were his specimens—i.e., he needed to ascertain how our rebellious generation read the canon in order to complete his critique of the human mind. In his fashion, Trilling took us more seriously than we took ourselves. He saw us as souls in danger of solidifying into dolts. Week in and week out, he undermined our first responses to books until we came to regard our feelings, ideas, and beliefs with a robust suspicion that was itself suspect. A student once resisted Trilling's request to imagine a contemporary text from the perspective of a Jane Austen character. "There are too many differences," the student complained. "You're a man," Trilling shot back. "Speculate!"
Jeffrey Klein
San Francisco, Calif.

In college, I had the opportunity to interview Lionel Trilling after he gave a lecture at the University of Virginia in February of 1975. Trilling starkly admitted the shock that the nineteen-sixties had put him through, claiming that the literary world was now a "narcissistic free-for-all where 'anything goes.'" Society had reached a stage, he said, "where it will gag at nothing." A comment about himself was perhaps more revealing. "Essentially, I'm a nineteenth-century person," Trilling said. "It has always been the writers of that century that meant the most to me: men like Dickens, Balzac, and Stendhal." When I asked him what had changed since then, he said, "We simply don't respond to the idea of the dominating genius." As he was rising to leave, he leaned toward me and asked, "Are you an English major?" "No," I said. "Philosophy." "Stick with philosophy," he replied. "There is a great deal to learn studying philosophy."
B. Ashton Nichols
Professor of the Liberal Arts
Dickinson College
Carlisle, Pa.

CORRECTION: In Paul Slansky's recent campaign quiz (Shouts & Murmurs, October 13th), Jessica Herzberg was described as having been fired from Fox News. In fact, Ms. Herzberg, a freelance producer who has moved to another network, was not fired.

•

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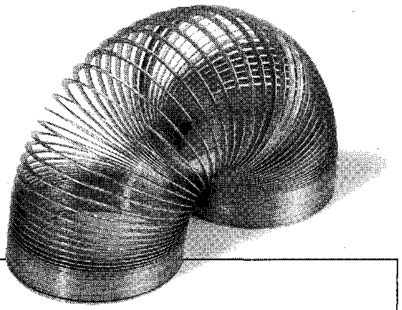

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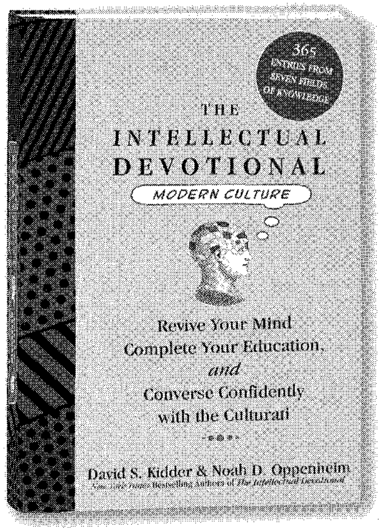
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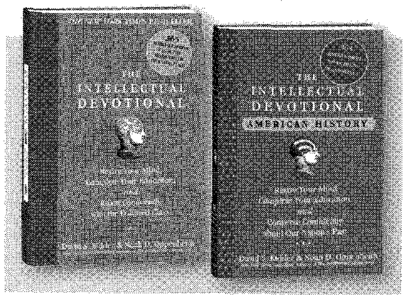

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"Billy Elliot the Musical," at the Imperial. Photograph by Landon Nordeman.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
19	20	21	15	16	17	18

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
SECURITY CHECK

The monologuist Mike Daisey takes on the Department of Homeland Security in his new piece, "If You See Something Say Something," at the Public. Jean-Michele Gregory directs. (See page 10.)

NIGHT LIFE
LIVE AT THE APOLLO

Antony Hegarty, the lead singer of the local group Antony and the Johnsons, has an angelic voice and a confessional approach that have endeared him to the likes of Lou Reed and Björk. He took home the prestigious Mercury Prize three years ago for the album "I Am a Bird Now," and he's preparing for the release of a new record with a show at the Apollo Theatre, backed by a full orchestra. (See page 13.)

ART
FRENCH TWIST

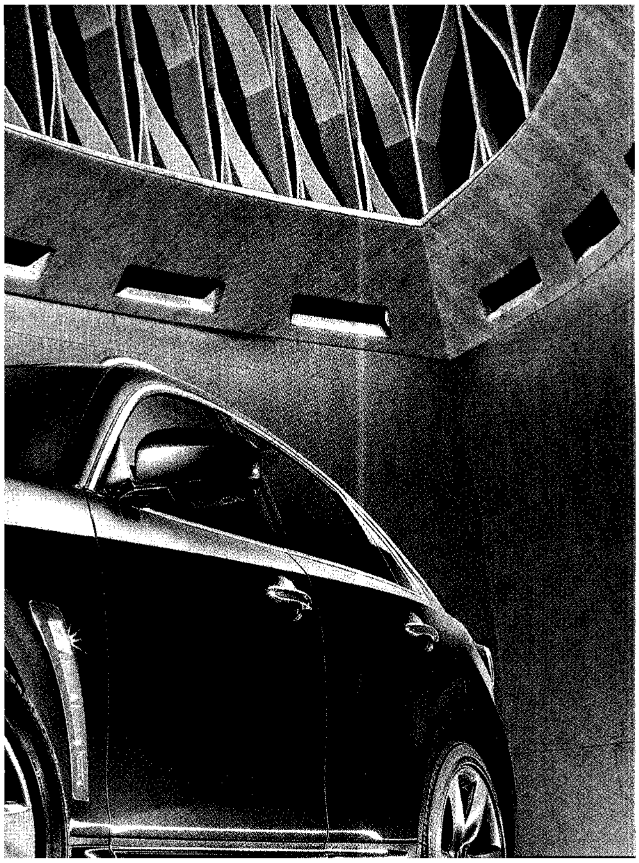
In 1926, after stints as an automotive engineer, a fireman in a ship's boiler room, and an illustrator, Alexander Calder moved to Paris. There, the American sculptor made his first wire drawings in space, performed his portable, crowd-pleasing "Circus," and invented his now famous mobiles. "Alexander Calder: The Paris Years, 1926-1933," at the Whitney, focusses on this early period. (See page 14.)

MOVIES
WITHIN OUR KEN

In 1969, Ken Jacobs reframed and slowed down a 1905 film, and the resulting work, "Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son," became a classic of American experimental filmmaking. MOMA offers several recent works by Jacobs, including his new version of the same source material, "Return to the Scene of the Crime," and the seven-hour-long film "Star Spangled to Death," which he worked on from 1956 to 2004. (See page 25.)

READINGS AND TALKS
AWAKENINGS

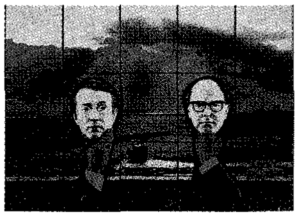
The actors Ellen Burstyn, Brian Cox, and Linus Roache give a dramatic reading based on the Dhammapada, a central Buddhist text made up of verses from Siddhartha Gautama, at the Rubin Museum of Art. (See page 26.)



CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
DOUBLE TAKE

The world of Gilbert & George, now on gaudy, overwhelming display at the Brooklyn Museum, revolves around the artists themselves, a pair of Brits dressed in conservative suits—or in nothing at all. On the evidence of some hundred photographs and drawings made between 1970 and 2006, the couple's work, which has expanded from postcard to billboard scale, has remained almost defiantly autobiographical and queer in every important sense of the word. Installed on two floors with no regard for chronology, their signature photographic grids feel especially dark and dense here; the best of them are as monumental, mannered, and arresting as history paintings. Gilbert & George use their own working-class East End London neighborhood as a microcosm in which to explore urban vitality, anxiety, bigotry, and decay, along with the bigger issues of sex, death, faith, and the redemptive power of beauty. Their companions on these explorations are handsome young men—women are utterly absent—who loom like demigods in landscapes that veer between Heaven and Hell. For the reliably provocative, even maddening Gilbert & George, there is little middle ground.

—Vince Aletti



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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ALL MY SONS
John Lithgow, Dianne Wiest, Patrick Wilson, and Katie Holmes star in Arthur Miller's play from 1947, about a businessman's shady dealings during the Second World War. Simon McBurney directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 16. (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL
Stephen Daldry directs the musical based on the movie, about a working-class boy who discovers a love for ballet. Elton John wrote the music, and Lee Hall wrote the book and lyrics. In previews. (Imperial, 240 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

BOYS' LIFE
Second Stage opens its season with Howard Korder's play from 1988, about three college friends living in New York. Michael Greif ("Rent") directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 20. (307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

CAPTURE NOW
Larry Moss directs the world première of a play by Josh Jonas, about the relationship between a teen-ager and his four-year-old brother. In previews. (45 Bleecker Street Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 212-239-6200.)

CATO
At the Flea, Jim Simpson directs Joseph Addison's play about the Roman statesman who fought in a civil war against Julius Caesar. Andre De Shields and Reg E. Cathey star. In previews. Opens Oct. 18. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

CLAY
A one-man coming-of-age hip-hop musical, written and performed by Matt Sax, kicks off the LCT3 initiative, presented by Lincoln Center Theatre. In previews. Opens Oct. 15. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

THE FOURPOSTER
The Keen Company opens its season with a revival of Jan de Hartog's play from 1951, set at the turn of the century, about a thirty-five-year marriage. In previews. Opens Oct. 19. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

IF YOU SEE SOMETHING SAY SOMETHING
Mike Daisey presents his monologue about the Department of Homeland Security. Jean-Michele Gregory directs. Previews begin Oct. 15. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

THE LANGUAGE OF TREES
The world première of a play by Steven Levenson, about an American translator who goes to a war zone in the Middle East, leaving his wife and son in the hands of a friendly neighbor. Alex Timbers directs. In previews. (Roundabout Underground, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

LOVE CHILD
Primary Stages presents a comedy written and performed by Daniel Jenkins and Robert Stanton, about the opening night of a play whose audience is so affected by the work that they feel moved to respond to the actors during the performance. In previews. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE MASTER BUILDER
The world première of the Tony-winning playwright Frank McGuinness's adaptation of Ibsen's play from 1892, about a brilliant architect who makes empty promises to a young girl. Ciarán O'Reilly directs. In previews. (Irish Rep, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

THE OEDIPUS CYCLE
The world première of Peter Constantine's translation of the Sophocles plays; Shepard Sobel directs. In previews. (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

ROCK OF AGES
Chris D'Arienzo wrote this play, set in the eighties, about a young Hollywood musician who dreams of being in an arena-rock band. Kristin Hanggi directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 16. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

ROMANTIC POETRY
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a new musical by John Patrick Shanley ("Moonstruck," "Doubt") and Henry Krieger ("Dreamgirls"), a romance set in Manhattan and its suburbs. In previews. (City Center, Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

SATURN RETURNS
Noah Haidle wrote this play, in which a radiologist (played by three different actors) confronts three women in various stages of his life. Previews begin Oct. 16. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

SPEED-THE-PLOW
Raúl Esparza, Elisabeth Moss, and Jeremy Piven star in David Mamet's play about the dark side of the film industry. Neil Pepe directs. In previews. (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

STREAMERS
Roundabout Theatre Company presents David Rabe's drama from 1976, set in 1965, about four soldiers in boot camp in Virginia, waiting to be deployed to Vietnam. Previews begin Oct. 17. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

WOYZECK
Iceland's Vesturport and the City Theatre present Georg Büchner's play, about a man driven mad by his suspicion that his wife is unfaithful to him. With original music by Nick Cave and Warren Ellis. Oct. 15-18. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100.)

NOW PLAYING

THE ATHEIST
A dark comedy written by Ronan Noone, directed by Justin Waldman and starring Campbell Scott, about an unethical reporter. (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-352-3101.)

BLACK WATCH
The National Theatre of Scotland returns to St. Ann's Warehouse with Gregory Burke's play, based on the Scottish Army's perspective on the Iraq war. Directed by John Tiffany. (38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

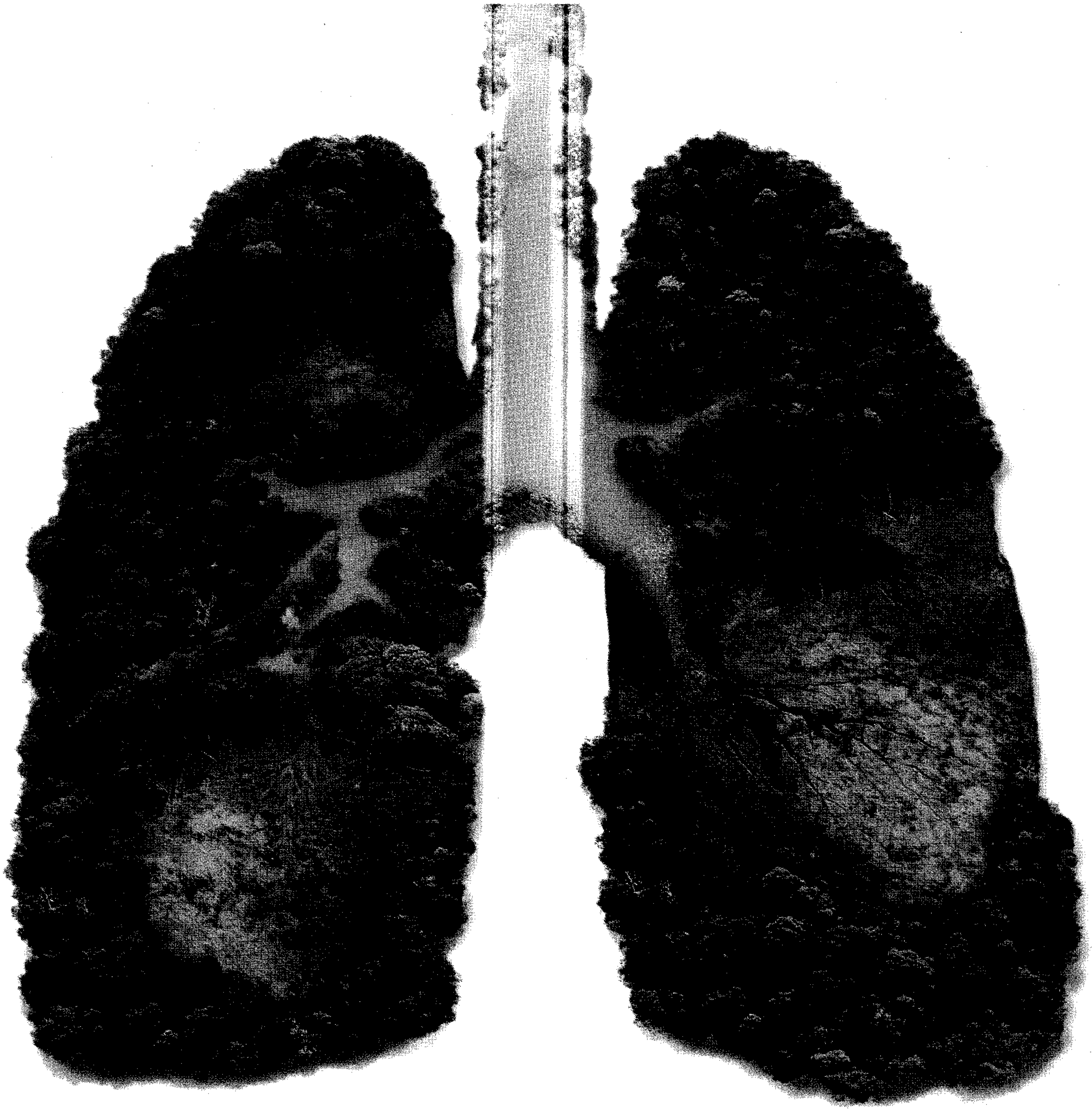
A BODY OF WATER
Primary Stages presents Lee Blessing's drama, about a vacationing couple who don't know where they are. Maria Mileaf directs. Starring Christine Lahti, Laura Odeh, and Michael Cristofer. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

FAULT LINES
In the Naked Angels production of Stephen Belber's new play, Jim (Dominic Fumusa) and Bill (Josh Lucas), old buds from way back, are catching up in an empty bar over beers and shots—toasting Bill's happy marriage and Jim's lasting ability to "break clay pigeons" (figuratively) with his semen, even though he's nearing forty—when a stranger, Joe (the riveting Noah Emmerich), intrudes. Joe begins to deconstruct Bill's life, starting with his marriage and ending with his relationship with Jim, a perpetual adolescent who, it turns out, has not been completely honest with his old friend about his rage at being essentially dropped. Though the production is slick and entertaining, it's not clear that all of the actors or the director, David Schwimmer, are ready to delve into the darkness, confusion, and pain that result from getting older but not growing up. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200.)

FIFTY WORDS
Austin Pendleton directs Michael Weller's play, starring Elizabeth Marvel and Norbert Leo Butz. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

KINDNESS
Playwrights Horizons presents the première of a new play by Adam Rapp, who also directs, about a woman who takes her teen-age son to Manhattan to escape their life in Illinois. Annette O'Toole stars. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS
Frank Langella stars in Robert Bolt's 1961 drama about Sir Thomas More, presented by the Round-



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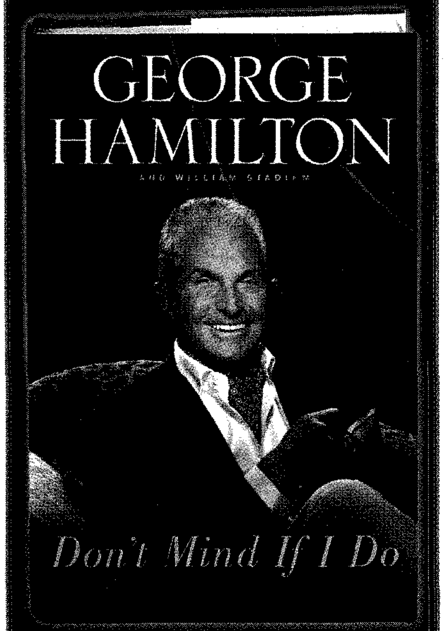

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about Theatre Company. (Reviewed in this issue.) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

THE SEAGULL
In the thrilling restaging of Ian Rickson's 2007 Royal Court production, Chekhov's eponymous bird is bagged on a whim by the morose twenty-five-year-old would-be playwright Konstantin Treplev (Mackenzie Crook) and laid at the feet of his young girlfriend, Nina (Carey Mulligan), a would-be actress, whose sparkling eyes are caught by the famous writer Trigorin (Peter Sarsgaard), who wanders the Treplev family estate in thrall to the sultry charms of Arkadina (Kristin Scott Thomas), Konstantin's equally famous actress mother. Bright-eyed, fresh-faced, and petite, Scott Thomas has a lithe presence that underscores Arkadina's childishness; Crook's gaunt, cadaverous look gives Konstantin a splendid ghostly quality. Rickson factors out Chekhov's algebra of aimlessness with extraordinary nuance. The evening, and the ensemble's achievement, is remarkable. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/13/08.) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

13
Jason Robert Brown's new musical features a high-energy cast and band, all of whom are under the age of eighteen. When his parents divorce, Evan Goldman (Graham Phillips) moves from Manhattan to small-town Indiana ("The Lamest Place in the World"). There, he befriends a kindred spirit, Patrice (the talented Allie Trimm), and Archie (Aaron Simon Gross), a charmer on crutches. But it's the rest of the school—popular, dopey Brett (Eric M. Nelsen) and his gang of toadies and mean girls—that Evan wants at his bar mitzvah, and the plot cranks through various schemes and betrayals before arriving at its predictable end. The catchy songs and endearing cast can't entirely redeem corny gags about "kicking it old-shul," "Jew-jitsu," French kissing, and puberty, all of which feel created by adults trying to cash in on a certain high-school-musical crowd. (Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

TO BE OR NOT TO BE
Nick Whitby wrote this play, a black comedy set in Warsaw in 1939, about a theatre troupe that becomes involved in spy games during the war. Casey Nicholaw directs. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

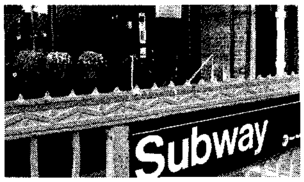
WIG OUT!
The over-hyped Tarell Alvin McCraney's new play follows a day in the lives and loves of a competitive house of drag-ball queens. The director, Tina Landau, has cast a number of ultimately unsure actors who try their hardest to squeeze some depth out of this mercilessly shallow script. (Nathan Lee Graham, as the over-the-hill house matriarch, and Sean Patrick Doyle, in a meagre but brilliantly executed role, are particular standouts.) Sadly, this sloppy spectacle is a prime example of putting style before substance, but it fails to make the grade on either count. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

Also Playing

ABSINTHE: Spiegeltent, South Street Seaport, Pier 17. 212-279-4200. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BOEING-BOEING:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **CELEBRITY AUTOBIOGRAPHY:** Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 212-868-4444. **ENTER LAUGHING:** St. Peter's Theatre, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 212-935-5820. **EQUUS:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE GLASS CAGE:** Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231. **GYPSY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **IN CONFLICT:** Culture Project, 27 Barrow St. 212-315-0231. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **IRENA'S VOW:** Baruch Performing Arts Center, 55 Lexington Ave. 212-352-3101. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **A TALE OF TWO CITIES:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE TEMPEST:** Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101. Through Oct. 19. **THE 39 STEPS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.

TABLES FOR TWO

NO. 7



7 Greene Ave., Brooklyn (718-522-6372)—Directly above the Lafayette C stop, marked only with a discreet and distressed "No. 7" above the door, this spot seems like the excursioning Manhattanite's dream: an easy commute, an instantly identifiable hipness (including tattooed servers), an ambitious, purée-laden menu. The bar area, with its white and black marble tiles, arched pressed-tin ceiling, and large plate-glass windows, has the impersonal chic of a boutique hotel lobby. By contrast, the dining room looks almost unfinished, and the white, U-shaped banquette seems like a dare. White stucco walls and casement windows, set near the ceiling, with window boxes of flowers running underneath, produce a discombobulating effect: the outside inside. The other night, entertainment was provided by the plaid-shirt-and-jeans-clad manager, who occasionally stepped out and, through a glass-paned door, could be seen clambering up a ladder.

The chef, Tyler Kord, who most recently cooked at Perry St., has referred to his kitchen style as "casual badass." That, presumably, means complicated dishes executed with an effortless air. It works. The menu is brief, suggesting careful curation, and even the bread, served with nutty, warm butter-bean purée and vinegary cucumbers, feels thoughtful. Kord loves his hot oil—the appetizer of cold roast pork is accompanied by a fried soft-boiled egg; the roast chicken rolled into its own skin and deep fried; the hanger steak topped with tiny circles of fried shallot. "It's totally insane," a waitress said one recent evening, describing the fried broccoli. Encased in a crunchy light tempura, the spears were nearly molten, their concentrated flavor boosted by a thick black-bean purée underneath. Kord has a flair for drama, too. The steak, along with a yellow-squash purée, came with fiery kimchi pierogies; the chicken was presented like a Rothko painting, with a stripe of deep-orange carrot purée, crisp green stalks of asparagus, and pale golden ovals of poultry. At times, the accumulation of fats gets overwhelming. "It's a butter sponge," a diner remarked of the brioche crouton perched alongside a heavily dressed green salad. Still, only the desserts seem to be trying too hard: a sesame devil's-food cake was layered with both peanut butter and marshmallow and came with a miniature ginger egg cream, complete with tiny bendy straw. After so much sophistication, it felt less whimsical than childish. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays for dinner. Entrées $16-$20.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

APOLLO THEATRE
253 W. 125th St. (212-531-5300)—Oct. 16: The lead singer of **Antony and the Johnsons,** who has a sweet and haunting voice reminiscent of Bryan Ferry's, won a Mercury Prize in 2005 for his album, "I Am a Bird Now," and has appeared onstage with Björk (he's a guest on her latest album, "Volta"). Early next year, Antony and his band are releasing a new album. He gives a taste of it here, backed by a full orchestra. Oct. 18: The singer-songwriter **Citizen Cope** (born Clarence Greenwood) traffics in complex narratives about everything from race and religion to life on the streets, layered over slow grooves and slightly funky beats.

BLENDER THEATRE AT GRAMERCY
127 E. 23rd St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 20: The local ensemble **Jesus H Christ and the Four Hornsmen of the Apocalypse** has a crusading horn section, some fine guitar playing, and a growing catalogue of sharply satirical power pop. Having made a splash on the Internet and satellite radio two years ago with the sparkling ditty "Connecticut's for Fucking" and a self-titled album, the group has a new album of prickly songs, "Happier Than You." Oct. 21: The rapping Chicago duo the **Cool Kids** boast of being the new black Beastie Boys, and their old-school bass-heavy approach has put them on the vanguard of the underground hip-hop scene.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Oct. 17: The amusing pop singer **Ben Kweller.** Oct. 21: **Lykke Li,** an up-and-coming singer from Sweden with a breathy technique and a winning way.

CUTTING ROOM
19 W. 24th St. (212-691-1900)—The French singer **Emilie Simon** favors layered songs that often incorporate unusual instrumentation; for a song on the soundtrack of the original French release of "March of the Penguins," she clicked ice cubes together to create a beat. Her work has been somewhat difficult to find—her sole U.S. release is "The Flower Book," from 2006. She's at this Flatiron club on Wednesdays through Oct. 22.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Oct. 15-16: **NOFX,** a long-running California pop-punk band rose to prominence alongside more successful ensembles like Green Day and Rancid. While they may not have matched the impact of those bands, NOFX's high-energy brand of irreverent punk (choice song titles include "Murder the Government," "Whoops I OD'd," and "Puke on Cops") has earned them a loyal if somewhat juvenile following.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Oct. 15: **Cherryholmes,** a family of perpetually touring bluegrass musicians. Oct. 17: **JJ Grey & Mofro.** Fronted by the Jacksonville, Florida, native John (JJ) Grey, this rocking Southern band built its reputation with thick swamp funk. Its new record, "Orange Blossoms," is a hot and humid affair.

LIVING ROOM
154 Ludlow St. (212-533-7235)—Oct. 15-16: Cinema buffs may recognize **Rebecca Pidgeon** from her clipped delivery of cryptic lines in such David Mamet films as "The Spanish Prisoner" and "State and Main," but Pidgeon (Mamet's wife) also has a career as a singer-songwriter whose pop-ish jazz sometimes shows a rootsy streak. Her most recent album, "Behind the Velvet Curtain," came out earlier this spring.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Oct. 18: The Texan power trio **Secret Machines** appeared earlier this decade with a sprawling sound and aesthetic that married the cinematic pomp of vintage Pink Floyd with the stentorian wallop of Led Zeppelin. Their live shows trade in crushing volume and blinding stage lights. After veering closer to pop accessibility with their third album, "Ten Silver Drops," in 2006, the guitarist Benjamin Curtis left the fold. He's since been replaced, and the band is getting ready for the release of a new album. Oct. 20: **Nikka Costa,** the daughter of the famed producer Don Costa, has Page Six good looks and a voice powerful enough to stop the presses. Her intoxicating mix of funk and rock and roll has made her a star abroad. She's not as well known here (her American début album, "Everybody Got Their Something," was a modest success in 2001), but she's giving it another shot. Her new album, "Pebble to a Pearl," comes out this week.

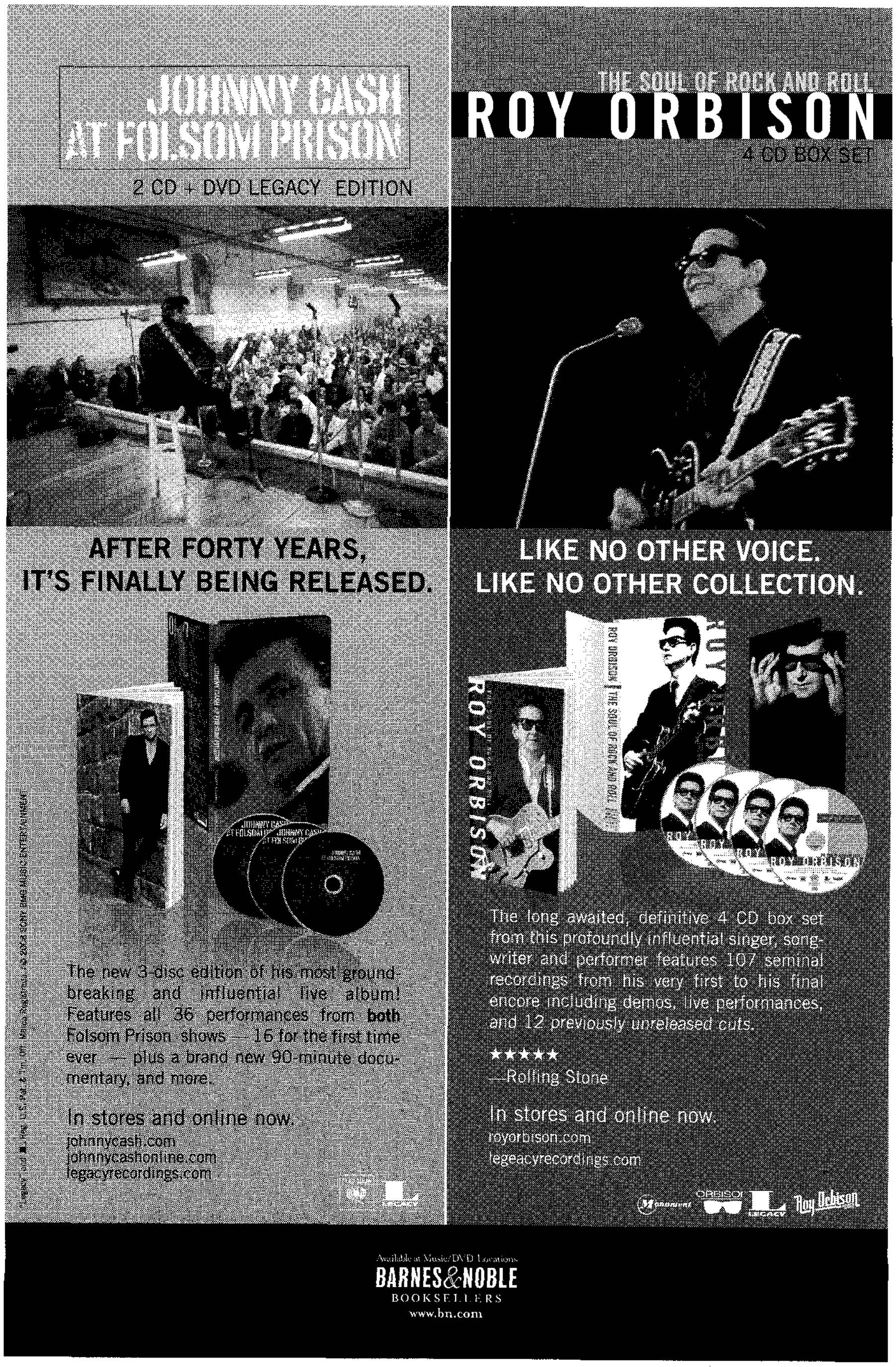
WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
Oct. 17: The trombonist **William Cepeda** explores the musical traditions of his native Puerto Rico, accompanied by seventeen musicians, dancers, and singers. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St.) Oct. 18: The spike-fiddle virtuoso **Kayhan Kalhor** and his ensemble offer a night of Persian classical music. (Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall. For more information about both concerts, call 212-545-7536.)

ZANKEL HALL
Carnegie Hall, 57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—Oct. 17: The discerning local independent radio station WFUV brings in **Nick Lowe,** the English singer-songwriter who has maintained an audaciously low-profile career for more than four decades. A lesser man would have given up, but bold staying power is the least that can be expected from someone who called his first solo album "Jesus of Cool" (the 1978 release was retitled "Pure Pop for Now People" for touchy Yanks). Lowe has had some chart success, most notably with the 1979 single "Cruel to Be Kind," and he produced a number of seminal albums by the likes of the Damned and Elvis Costello. On his own, he's a tireless purveyor of rootsy, hook-laden pop and wryly winsome country-rock.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Oct. 14-Nov. 8: **Paula West,** an assured singer of durable and

HONORE BROWN



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offbeat standards whose performances have a lived-in ease that eludes many of the pearly-toothed upstarts now crowding the scene.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Oct. 14-19: The **Count Basie Orchestra.** The Count himself and the star soloists and arrangers who brought the Basie band fame are a distant memory, but as long as the ensemble keeps its brass barking and the rhythm airborne the legacy of Kansas City swing is still intact.

CAFÉ CARLYLE
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through Nov. 1: The guitarist and singer **John Pizzarelli** and his wife, **Jessica Molaskey,** both have exceptional new albums out. His is "With a Song in My Heart," and hers is "A Kiss to Build a Dream On." Their convivial act has plenty of entertainment and first-class musicianship.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Oct. 14-19: The trumpeter **Nicholas Payton** started off as a traditionalist and has since evolved into a new-era eclectic ready to mix elements of swing, hard bop, and the blues with fusion and contemporary R.& B. His exceptional command of his horn holds it all together.

HIGHLIGHTS IN JAZZ
Oct. 16: The "Jazz Is My Passport" show looks at the music through an international lens, with performances by the Kyrgyzstanian pianist **Eldar,** the Brazilian neo-bossa band **Trio da Paz,** the veteran Canadian vibraphonist **Warren Chiasson,** the Israeli guitarist **Roni Ben-Hur,** and the Australian bassist **Dr. Lyn Christie.** (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 99 Chambers St. 212-220-1460.)

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Oct. 16-19: **Eddie Daniels** upholds the honor of the clarinet, an instrument too often overlooked in post-bop jazz. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—Oct. 17-18: **Joey DeFrancesco,** who has spent the past few decades immersing himself in the world of the Hammond B-3 organ, is joined in the Allen Room by the tenor saxophonists **Vincent Herring, David (Fathead) Newman,** and **John Nugent.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Oct. 14-16: The saxophonist **Greg Osby,** one of jazz's foremost talent scouts, presents ensembles now recording for his Inner Circle Music record label. First up, on Oct. 14, is the tenor saxophonist **Meilana Gillard** and her band, Fine Print, followed by the tenor saxophonist **Jacob Yoffee** and his quartet. Oct. 15: The vibraphonist **Mike Pinto** precedes the alto saxophonist **Logan Richardson.** Oct. 16: The vocalist **Sara Serpa** has the early set, and Osby's 9 Levels band fills the late slot. Oct. 17-19: **Dena DeRose,** an under-recognized singer and pianist, gets the backing of the high-pedigree rhythm section of the bassist **Martin Wind** and the drummer **Tim Horner.** Oct. 21: The **Bad Touch,** a bass-less quartet featuring the saxophonist **Loren Stillman** and the keyboardist **Gary Versace,** has more potential than its moniker suggests. The **Mingus Bands** are in rotating residence on Monday nights.

SMALLS
183 W. 10th St. (212-252-5091)—Oct. 15: The pianist and club co-owner **Spike Wilner** performs solo. Later that night, the Italian pianist **Marco di Gennaro** joins the saxophone legend **Lee Konitz.** Oct. 16: The pianist **Ehud Asherie** performs duets with the saxophonist **Dan Block.**

TRIBECA PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
199 Chambers St. (212-220-1460)—The Tribeca Cabaret Series gets under way on Oct. 17-18 with **Kate McGarry.** Her new album, "If Less Is More, Nothing Is Everything," finds the singer taking on established standards ("You're My Thrill") and more recently minted material (the Cars' "Just What I Needed").

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Oct. 14-19: The **Bill Charlap** trio. Working in spruce synchronicity with the bassist **Peter Washington** and the drummer **Kenny Washington,** the pianist Charlap displays the poise and taste—and, increasingly, the depth—of such grand stylists as Hank Jones and the late Tommy Flanagan. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Giorgio Morandi, 1890-1964."** Through Dec. 14. ♦ **"Landscapes Clear and Radiant: The Art of Wang Hui (1632-1717)."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Royal Porcelain from the Twinight Collection: 1800-1850."** Through April 19. ♦ **"Jeff Koons on the Roof."** Through Oct. 26. ♦ **"Rhythms of Modern Life: British Prints, 1914-1939."** Through Dec. 7. ♦ **"New York, N. Why?: Photographs by Rudy Burckhardt, 1937-1940."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"The Essential Art of African Textiles: Design Without End."** Through March 22. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

Jordi Savall and Hespèrion XXI perform music from the age of Cervantes on Oct. 20.

YUKO SHIMIZU

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Van Gogh and the Colors of the Night."** Through Jan. 5. ♦ **"Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling."** Through Oct. 20. ♦ **"Projects 88: Lucy McKenzie."** Through Dec. 1. ♦ **"Kirchner and the Berlin Street."** Through Nov. 10. ♦ **"New Photography 2008: Josephine Meckseper and Mikhael Subotzky."** Through Jan. 5. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Catherine Opie: American Photographer."** Through Jan. 7. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Alexander Calder: The Paris Years, 1926-1933."** Opens Oct. 16. ♦ **"Corin Hewitt: Seed Stage."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Signs of the Times."** Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Gilbert & George."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Jesper Just: Romantic Delusions."** The young Danish artist makes lush short films that add music—and empathy—to the absurd noir style familiar to fans of David Lynch and Aki Kaurismäki. Just's plots center on intergenerational male duos interacting in surreal scenarios. A teenager follows a beefy trucker into the back of a semi, which has been transformed into a sumptuous theatre; on stage, the trucker breaks into song. A gentleman dances in a town square while a younger man watches him, moved to tears. Just's most recent film, "Romantic Delusions," follows a middle-aged man who wears a bra under his tank top as "s/he" wanders through Bucharest. It is less emotionally powerful than the other works here, but no less enchantingly strange. Through Jan. 4. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"The Horse."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Lizards and Snakes: Alive!"** Through Jan. 5. **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS
1040 Grand Concourse (718-681-6000)—**"Street Art, Street Life: From the 1950s to Now."** Through Jan. 25. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Susan Meiselas: In History."** Through Jan. 4 . ♦ **"America and the Tintype."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Cornell Capa: Concerned Photographer."** The late photojournalist worked for *Life* from 1946 to 1967 and the Magnum photo agency beginning in 1954. He used the classic photo-essay format to cover, among many other subjects, the plight of Peruvian tribes in the Amazon region, poverty in El Salvador and Nicaragua, and the prison conditions that led to the uprising at Attica. High-contrast black-and-white images line the walls here; vitrines filled with books, contact sheets, and other ephemera add nuance to the scene. In a sense, the venue itself is a part of the show: after the death of his better-known brother Robert, in 1954, at the age of forty-one, Capa committed himself to preserving the work of photographers who approached their medium with a humanitarian eye—and founded I.C.P., in 1974. Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Living with the Dead: W. Eugene Smith and World War II."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Drawing Babar: Early Drafts and Watercolors."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Liszt in Paris: Enduring Encounters."** Through Nov. 16. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEUM OF ARTS & DESIGN
2 Columbus Circle (212-299-7777)—**"Second Lives: Remixing the Ordinary."** With a name change earlier this decade that provided a snappy acronym

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(MAD) and, as of last month, a sleek new building in Columbus Circle, the former American Craft Museum is looking more design-forward than ever. But, judging by the inaugural exhibition, craft remains central to its vision. Materials are key here: there are works made entirely from spools of thread, tires, shoes, shopping bags, latex gloves, old furniture, plastic spoons, and vinyl records. Still, many of the fifty-four artists whose works are on view will be familiar to those who regularly trawl the city's galleries and museums, including Xu Bing, Fred Wilson, Do Ho Suh, El Anatsui, Jean Shin, Chakaia Booker, Willie Cole, and Cornelia Parker. Through Feb. 15. ♦ **"Elegant Armor: The Art of Jewelry."** Through May 31. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 9.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"George Tooker: A Retrospective"** surveys the career of the mild American post-Surrealist, who is now eighty-eight years old. He is worth remembering for iconic images—rendered in glowing egg tempera—that apostrophize mid-century angst: the mysteriously distraught citizens in the Whitney Museum's "Subway" (1950) and the spooky insomniacs in MOMA's "The Sleepers" (1959). His subsequent work turned disappointingly bland. The show conveys the artist's personal sweetness, in evocations of a beloved companion who died too soon. Tooker's niche in history is small but firm. Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"The Unknown Blakelock"** is a scrappy but exciting retrospective of the largely self-taught, cracked American original (1847-1919), whose early Hudson River Schoolish and Barbizon-influenced landscapes gave way to nocturnes in splotched and encrusted oils. The effects jolt. Background and foreground interpenetrate. Light seems produced by frictions of muscular effort. An egg-white moon in a celadon sky is almost painfully bright. In no other painting before Abstract Expressionism does raw paint—as literal as bugs hitting a summer windshield—possess such poetry. Blakelock is habit-forming. Let's have a properly great big show of him soon. Through Jan. 4. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Alfred Kubin: Drawings, 1897-1909."** Through Jan. 26. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Live Forever: Elizabeth Peyton."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Museum as Hub: Six Degrees."** Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"Drawn by New York: Six Centuries of Watercolors and Drawings."** Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Grant and Lee in War and Peace."** Opens Oct. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Neohoodoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith."** Opens Oct. 19. ♦ **"Leandro Erlich: Swimming Pool."** Opens Oct. 19. ♦ **"Yael Bartana."** Opens Oct. 19. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

FLORIAN BÖHM
This German photographer is working familiar territory—the crowded New York street—in a familiar way. Garry Winogrand, Joel Meyerowitz, and Philip-Lorca diCorcia have been here before, and much more memorably. But sometimes it's enough for a photograph to act like a one-way mirror and allow us to spy on our fellow-citizens. Bohm's subjects have all stopped at a corner to wait for the light to change, and most are unaware of his camera. A gaggle of preteen girls, a Scout troop, tourists in shorts, and a host of other melting-pot pedestrians populate a series of unexpectedly fascinating friezes. Through Oct. 18. (Cohen Amador, 41 E. 57th St. 212-759-6740.)

"O CANADA"
The emerging American artists in this show were all born north of the border and now work in New York. Jaclyn Meloche's slide projection includes photographs of unremarkable land on both sides of the border. Julie Lequin narrates a faux "This American Life" segment in charmingly Québécois-accented English. Issues of nationality give way to formal concerns in Jonah Groeneboer's dematerialized wall "drawing," created with a red laser, and in Julia Dault's sculpture made of rolled, suspended sheets of Formica—although a "Made in Canada" stamp is visible on one of the latter. Through Oct. 20. (Gallery MC, 549 W. 52nd St. 212-581-1966.)

"UNTITLED (VICARIOUS)"
The season's first great photographic survey show takes as its subject the increasingly busy and productive exchange between photography and sculpture, which, the curator Tom Duncan persuades us, includes everything from James Welling's chunks of gelatin to Cindy Sherman's grotesquely eroticized mannequins. With some fifty pieces, dating from the thirties and forties (David Smith, László Moholy-Nagy) to the present (Sara Vanderbeek, Leslie Hewitt), the exhibition covers a provocatively broad range of photographed constructions, assemblages, and arrangements. Following the connection between Anne Hardy's half-trashed rooms, Roger Ballen's grimy, graffiti-covered walls, and Carter Mull's hideous heaps of hair, dust, and rhinestones is just one way to track the lively conversation here. Through Nov. 1. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313.)

Short List

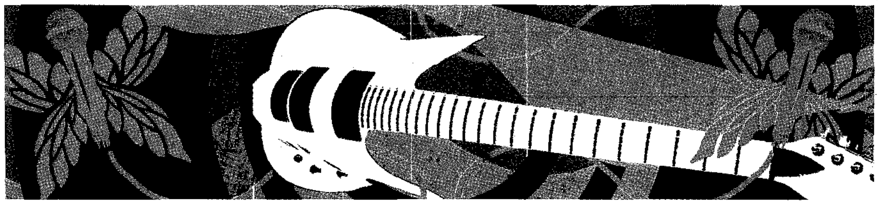
ALEX KATZ: Baumgold, 74 E. 79th St. 212-861-7338. Through Nov. 26. **LOTHAR BAUMGARTEN:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Opens Oct. 21. **MARIA ELENA GONZÁLEZ:** Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 212-794-0550. Through Nov. 1. **MARY HEILMANN:** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through Oct. 25. **BRUCE WRIGHTON:** Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930. Through Oct. 25.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

ROBERT INDIANA
The show doubles as an eightieth-birthday celebration for the artist best known as the creator of the iconic "Love" sculpture. Metal words—"Eat," "Art," "Amor"—and numbers are installed around the gallery, some made of brightly colored aluminum, others of stainless and Corten steel. Indiana's work entered the culture at large with a force matched only by Warhol, with roots reaching back to American modernists—the texts in Stuart Davis's paintings come to mind. Through Nov. 1. (Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 212-563-4474.)

ALIX PEARLSTEIN
Pearlstein strips drama down to the bare bones—conflict, intimacy, ritual—in deadpan videos that alchemize the theatrical and the cinematic into a seductive third genre. Call it glam minimalism. In the four-channel video "After the Fall," eight actors—four costumed in black and gold, the others in red and pink—conspire, break rank, and regroup in an absurd power struggle over a flimsy white board. Dialogue, though audible, is largely incomprehensible. There are traces of Bertolt Brecht, Lars Von Trier, Michael Snow, and even the tents in Bryant Park in Pearlstein's gorgeous, rigorous mind-and-body game. Through Oct. 18. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St., 212-255-5793.)

MICHEL SZULC-KRZYZANOWSKI
The twenty photographic sequences in this show were made between 1977 and 1982 while the art-



JOHN RITTER

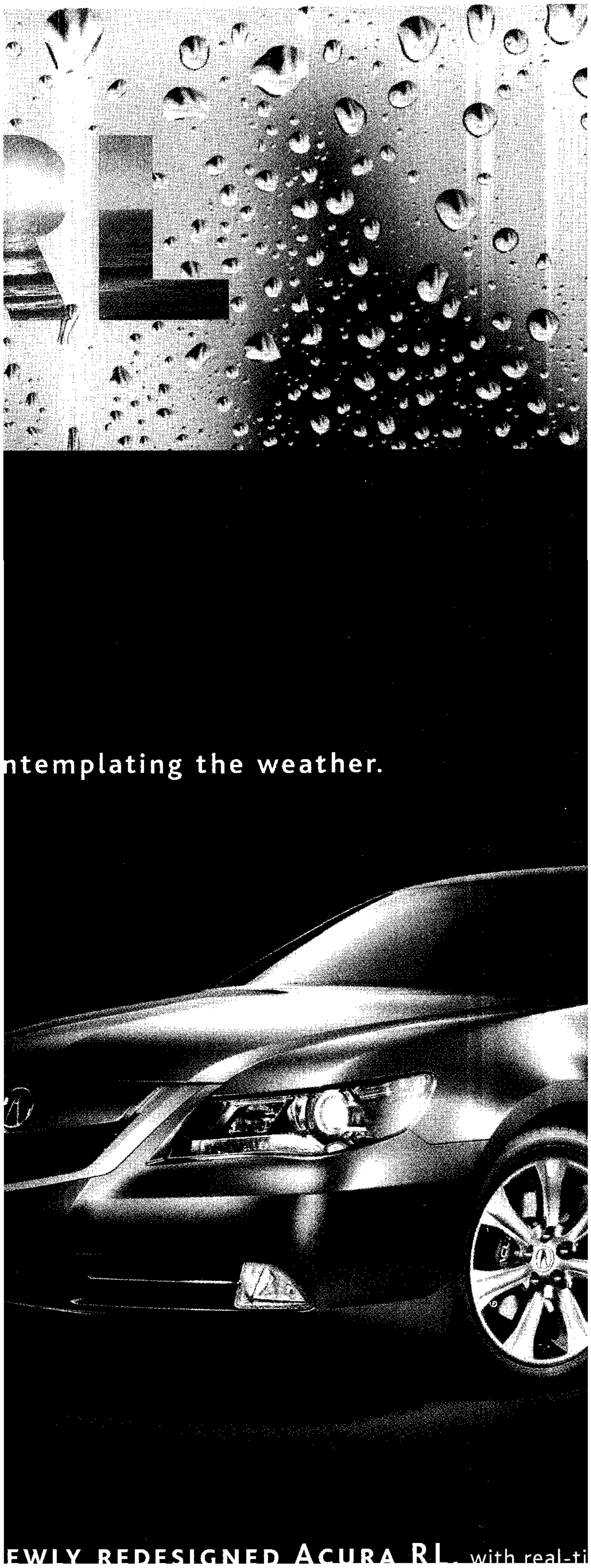
POP NOTES
ODDS AND ENDS

Bob Dylan's new collection of outtakes and rarities, **"Tell Tale Signs: Rare and Unreleased, 1989-2006"** (Sony), is an object lesson in the oddness of modern record distribution. In addition to the basic two-disk version, which has twenty-seven songs, there is a deluxe edition that includes an extra CD with twelve more songs and a hardcover book with photographs of Dylan singles. The week before the record's official release, the two-disk version of the album was streamed in its entirety on NPR's Web site. A record company that doesn't know whether to charge extortionate prices or give music away? Telltale signs indeed.

However the pricing and distribution issues shake out, in the end, it'll come down to the music, and there's plenty of it here. This isn't a comprehensive portrait of Dylan's recent decades, but it is, like his eccentric memoir, "Chronicles," a portrait nonetheless. The Dylan of "Tell Tale Signs" is rooted in the prewar blues and country of the Mississippi Delta, within spitting distance of Hinds County (the birthplace of Charley Patton, the inspiration for Dylan's "High Water") and Hazlehurst (the birthplace of Robert Johnson, whose "32-20 Blues" is represented here in a sprightly acoustic outtake). There's also a cover of Jimmie Rodgers's "Miss the Mississippi and You" and two versions of "Mississippi," a Dylan original that was cut for "Time Out of Mind" in 1997 and loaned to Sheryl Crow before reappearing on "Love and Theft," in 2001.

While there are plenty of live tracks, scatterings from soundtracks ("Cross the Green Mountain," "Huck's Tune," "Tell Ol' Bill"), and outtakes from "Oh Mercy" and "Modern Times" (most are interesting; none are superior to the recorded versions), the most rewarding finds are, like "Mississippi," recovered from the elementally bleak "Time Out of Mind." That album was produced—some would say overproduced—by Daniel Lanois, though the versions of the songs here are less layered with Lanoisist gunk. The best tracks are the simplest, including the first version of "Mississippi" and the glistening mid-tempo epic "Red River Shore." The most recent composition, "Can't Escape from You," recorded in 2005 for a film that was never released, has trains and hopes and dreams, along with a snippet of Shakespeare, put across in a still-vital croak.

—*Ben Greenman*


ntemplating the weather.
EWLY REDESIGNED ACURA RL. with real-ti

The inventive French indie-pop singer-songwriter Emilie Simon, shown here wearing one of her custom instruments, is at the Cutting Room on Wednesday nights.

ETHAN LEVITAS

ist was living in Baja California, which may account for their combination of conceptual smarts and trippy wit. Composed of between two and seven photographs, each piece finds Szulc-Krzyzanowski on the beach, playing with our perceptions. With the sea, the sand, and the sky as his serene backdrop, he levitates a stick, eclipses his shadow with his open palms, and shrinks a sand dollar. There's nothing particularly rigorous or revelatory here, but the work is entertaining, ingratiating, and not without flashes of magic. Through Oct. 18. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 24th St. 212-989-7600.)

"SCULPTING TIME"

A high-concept group show installed in a warren of specially designed rooms pays off in aesthetic kicks. Never mind the amorphous theme, which really befits only Roman Opalka's obsessive number painting and On Kawara's compulsive date recording. Josef Albers has never, ever, looked better than in finely selected and dramatically lighted "Homages to the Square," including one in green-black, blue-black, and black that will make you remember, and then forget, Ad Reinhardt. The Giorgio Morandis are knockouts: only notionally about time but definitely time-consuming, because once you start looking at them, you will be disinclined to stop. Andrew Grassie's brittlely clever Photo-Realist paintings on paper, of rooms in the gallery other than the ones where they hang, do no harm. Through Nov. 1. (Sperone Westwater, 415 W. 13th St. 212-999-7337.)

Short List

RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER: Nolan, 527 W. 29th St. 212-925-6190. Through Dec. 6. **NICOLE CHERUBINI:** D'Amelio Terras: 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460. Through Nov. 1. **JUDITH EISLER:** Cohan and Leslie, 138 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-206-8710. Through Nov. 15. **DAVID HARRISON:** Reich, 537A W. 23rd St. 212-924-4949. Through Oct. 18. **MATTHEW DAY JACKSON:** Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335. Through Oct. 18. **SEAN LANDERS:** Petzel, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Through Nov. 8. **MATTHEW MONAHAN:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through Nov. 15. **ERNESTO NETO:** Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144. Through Nov. 15. **PHILIPPE PARRENO:** Petzel, 537 W. 22nd St 212-680-9467. Through Nov. 8.

DANCE

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE

Fresh from its recent coup—snapping up the Russian choreographer Alexei Ratmansky for the position of artist-in-residence—the company presents its two-week fall season at City Center, which is focused on the British choreographer Antony Tudor, whose centennial is this year. On opening night, Gillian Murphy and David Hallberg will perform the intimate pas de deux from Tudor's one-act "Romeo and Juliet" ("Romeo's Farewell"), so different from the high-voltage MacMillan version usually performed by A.B.T. The evening will also include "Theme and Variations," George Balanchine's sumptuous homage to the Russian Imperial Ballet, as well as an excerpt from Jiří Kylián's "Overgrown Path" and a solo created for Michele Wiles by the company member Craig Salstein. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Oct. 21 at 6:30. Through Nov. 2.)

SAN FRANCISCO BALLET

The venerable ballet troupe celebrates its seventy-fifth anniversary, with a rich blend of the classic and the innovative in its repertoire, including a well-maintained dose of Balanchine, as well as a growing collection of neoclassical ballets by Helgi Tomasson, the artistic director. For the full program, visit www.nycitycenter.org. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Oct. 14-16 at 7:30, Oct. 17 at 8, and Oct. 18 at 2 and 8.)

BALLET HISPANICO

The company's two-week season at the Joyce is the last with its pioneering founder, Tina Ramirez, as artistic director, who performs a small role in Graciela Daniele's "Stages." (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Oct. 14-15 at 7:30, Oct. 16-17 at 8, Oct. 18 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 19 at 2 and 7:30.)

TRAJAL HARRELL

Sincerity in an age of irony is the primary concern of Harrell's "Quartet for the End of Time." One strategy is to import sections from Olivier Messiaen's composition of the same title, a sincere expression of spiritual love partially composed in a Nazi war camp. Harrell also has a persistent interest in fashion (there's a thrift-store catwalk) and audiovisual collage (he includes scenes from one film and dialogue from another). The half of the piece that uses live performers becomes a striptease without the tease, a solemn struggle to remove clothing and meticulously fold it afterward, letting the nakedness and scattered garments suggest what they may. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Oct. 15-18 at 7:30.)

PASIÓN FLAMENCA

The local outfit, an offshoot of the New York Center for Flamenco Performing Arts, gives a flamenco-present, flamenco-past program. "Tributes," which incorporates video, collects two recent paeans, one to the miners of Andalusia, the other to victims of AIDS in the flamenco community. "Estampas Flamencas" evokes the origins of the art. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. Oct. 16-18 at 8 and Oct. 19 at 3.)

"REWIND"

The B-boys of Knucklehead Zoo continue their run at the New Victory. (209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Oct. 17 at 7, Oct. 18 at 2 and 7, and Oct. 19 at noon and 5.)

POCKEMON CREW

The invasion of French hip-hop troupes staged by the I Kiffe NY French Urban Cultures Festival continues with the Lyon-based Pockemon Crew, which has been around for ten years. "C'est Ça la Vie!?," a hit at the 2006 Biennale de la Danse, uses autobiographical video segments to isolate cultural elements—North African, French, and American—and high-powered skills to put the hybrid across. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-307-7171. Oct. 17 at 8 and Oct. 18 at 2.)

JODY SPERLING/TIME LAPSE DANCE

The fruits of Sperling's somewhat quixotic mission—to import the methods of the early-modern fabric-and-light pioneer Loie Fuller into a contemporary context—can yield uncommon, unexpected pleasure. "Ballet of Light" reimagines a Fuller piece from 1908 in which images were projected onto transparent gauze. For her new piece "Ghosts," the lights Sperling wears are L.E.D. Her comic works "Bang for the Buck" and "Leg Up" draw on another antiquarian interest: the acrobats and contortionists of early film. (Ailey Citigroup Theatre, 405 W. 55th St. 212-868-4444. Oct. 17-18 at 8 and Oct. 19 at 3.)

"SPLICE: UNRAVELED"

Dance New Amsterdam's double-bill series pairs choreography by Heidi Latsky and Jen Abrams. Latsky offers excerpts from "Gimp," her ongoing work featuring disabled dancers, which beautifully resets preconceptions about bodies and movement. Abrams, an expert in the balance-sharing of contact improv who also has a background in theatre, presents a text-and-video-assisted study in intimate relationships called "Involution." (280 Broadway, at Chambers St. 212-279-4200. Oct. 17 at 8:30, Oct. 18 at 3 and 8:30, and Oct. 19 at 3.)

"CATCH 32"

This multidisciplinary sampler of mostly unknown avant-garde performers, curated and casually hosted by Jeff Larson and Andrew Dinwiddie, keeps things short and lively. The lineup for the current installment includes Tymberly Harris, Anna Sperber, the Thank You Campaign, and the Theatre of a Two-Headed Calf. (The Bushwick Starr, 207 Starr St., Brooklyn. www.catchseries.org. Oct. 18 at 8.)

BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE

The Australian indigenous dance company presents the traditions of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in contemporary dance spectacles that tend to be handsome and anodyne. "Awakenings," the latest production to come to BAM, is no exception. Of its two parts, the second is the more interesting, a fusing of the story of a young woman's initiation into womanhood with a myth about a girl who was turned into a bird. Here, at least, there's a hint of a

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darkness not caused by the lighting designer. (Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. Oct. 21 at 7:30. Through Oct. 25.)

ODC/DANCE

Brenda Way, the director of this San Francisco-based contemporary dance company, is not afraid to tackle big themes: a few years ago, she made a surprisingly engaging piece about global warming. Her grounded, athletic, and highly individual dancers are back at the Joyce, to present four new works. Way's "Unintended Consequences" and KT Nelson's "Hunting and Gathering" deal with the alienation and brutality of modern life. A lighter, more balletic piece, set to Baroque music, and another, an exploration of moods set to Meredith Monk vocalizations, complete the program. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Oct. 21 at 7:30. Through Oct. 26.)

LUCIANA ACHUGAR

The Uruguay-born experimental choreographer and dancer presents "The Sublime Is Us," in which Achugar and four other female performers literally feel their way around the relationship between dancer and spectator, bringing the audience into the dancers' home turf, the dance studio. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Oct. 21 at 7:30. Through Nov. 2).

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

Mary Zimmerman's daring—and rewarding—new production of **"Lucia di Lammermoor"** stars Diana Damrau (in the title role), along with Piotr Beczala, Vladimir Stoyanov, and Ildar Abdrazakov; Marco Armiliato, the Met's reliable Italian hand, is on the podium. (Oct. 15 at 8 and Oct. 18 at 8:30.) ♦ Karita Mattila's jaw-dropping performance in the title role of **"Salome"** in 2004 set New York on its ear, with her (very) brief nude scene adding to the excitement; now she's back, singing as bravely as ever. Jürgen Flimm's production, at once lurid and mystical, returns as well, with Ildikó Komlósi, Kim Begley, Joseph Kaiser, and Juha Uusitalo (a fearsome John the Baptist) completing the cast; Patrick Summers finds the danger, if not the derangement, in Strauss's thrilling score. (Oct. 16 at 8. This is the final performance.) ♦ In a striking example of the new Met's range, Peter Gelb presents the New York première of John Adams's **"Doctor Atomic,"** an opera that gives a lyrical tone and a mythic dimension to the invention of the atomic bomb, at Los Alamos at the end of the Second World War. Reviews of the San Francisco Opera's première production professed admiration for the music but criticized the opera's somewhat static, oratorio-like pacing; Gelb has commissioned an entirely new production, directed by Penny Woolcock, who made the acclaimed film version of another problematic Adams opera, "The Death of Klinghoffer." Two superb singers, Gerald Finley (a young house favorite) and Eric Owens (making his début), reprise their San Francisco roles of J. Robert Oppenheimer and his nemesis, General Leslie Groves; Sasha Cooke sings the role of Kitty Oppenheimer; Alan Gilbert, making his house début, conducts. (Oct. 18 at 1 and Oct. 21 at 8.) ♦ The beloved Franco Zeffirelli production of **"La Traviata"** returns to the house with a cast led by Anja Harteros, Massimo Giordano, and Andrzej Dobber; Paolo Carignani. (Oct. 20 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

ETHEL'S "TRUCKSTOP: THE BEGINNING"

The utterly winning downtown string quartet makes its first venture into music theatre this week, a distillation of the group's roots-music residencies in ten cities. Joining them are the *conjunto* accordionist Eva Ybarra, the Native American flutist Robert Mirabal, the Hawaiian slack-key guitarist Jeff Peterson, and the bluegrass banjo player Dean Osborne; Annie Dorsen, who co-created the show, directs. (BAM Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. Oct. 14 and Oct. 16-18 at 7:30.)

OPERA ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK: "THE TSAR'S BRIDE"

Eve Queler's ensemble, not for the first time, rescues a worthy piece (Rimsky-Korsakov's opera of intrigue at the court of Ivan the Terrible) from the back shelf, in a concert performance at Carnegie Hall that features the notable singers Olga Borodina, Olga Makarina, and Alexey Markov. (212-247-7800. Oct. 15 at 7:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

The orchestra and its Spanish guest conductor, Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos, devote themselves this week to four concert performances of Manuel de Falla's passionate one-act opera **"La Vida Breve"** ("The Short Life"), redolent of the sound and color of Granada circa 1900. To give this rarely heard masterpiece all the authenticity it deserves, the Philharmonic is bringing over a native cast (all making their débuts), the dancer Nuria Pomares, and the Coro Nacional de España. As a prelude, de Burgos leads his own arrangement of five movements from Albéniz's "Suite Española," for piano. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Oct. 16 and Oct. 21 at 7:30 and Oct. 17-18 at 8.)

JAN VOGLER AND THE KNIGHTS

The genre-blurring music club (Le) Poisson Rouge mixes local favorites with bona-fide stars. One of the latter is the superb young German cellist Jan Vogler, who will join the Knights chamber orchestra in performances of Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No. 1 (plus some of the composer's film music, arranged by Ljova) and Jimi Hendrix's "Machine Gun" (arranged by Kyle Sanna). (158 Bleecker St. www.lepoissonrouge.com. Oct. 15-16 at 7:30.)

TALLIS SCHOLARS

Peter Phillips's renowned English choir, a regular on the Miller Theatre series, comes to midtown's Church of St. Mary the Virgin to offer a tribute to three choral geniuses of the Spanish High Renaissance—Lobo (the "Missa Maria Magdalene"), Victoria (including Three Lamentations for Holy Saturday), and Guerrero. (145 W. 46th St. 212-854-7799. Oct. 16 at 8.)

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Haydn's "Fire Symphony" (No. 59)—one of those middle-period gems that get taken out only once in a blue moon—is merely the introduction to an exceptionally inviting program by the conductorless orchestra that continues with music by Paul Moravec (the world première of "Brandenburg Gate," a doff of the hat to Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 2), Ibert, and Saint-Saëns (the entertaining Piano Concerto No. 2 in G Minor, with Jean-Yves Thibaudet). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 16 at 8.)

NEW YORK POPS

Carnegie Hall's Bernstein Festival hands the torch to the late Skitch Henderson's redoubtable orchestra, which, under the direction of Constantine Kitsopoulos, offers nuggets from "West Side Story," "On the Town," and "Wonderful Town" with the help of the vocalists Christiane Noll and Lillias White and the pianist Fred Hersch, among others. (212-247-7800. Oct. 17 at 8.)

"MUSIC BEFORE 1800" SERIES: POMERIUM

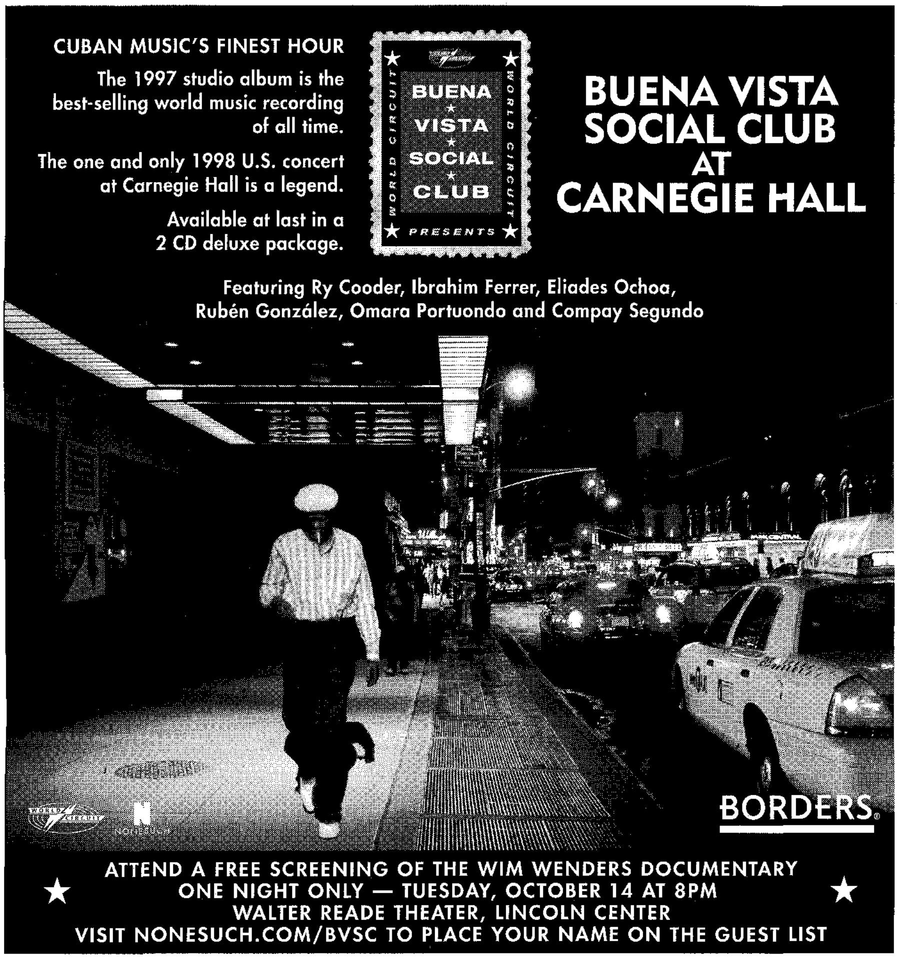
The early-music chorus, a longtime favorite at Corpus Christi Church, sings Mannerist music of the late Renaissance by Lassus, Rore, and Gesualdo. (529 W. 121st St. 212-666-9266. Oct. 19 at 4.)

ISABEL BAYRAKDARIAN: MUSIC BY GOMIDAS

In what can only be called an act of love, the elegant and communicative Canadian soprano reaches back to her heritage by devoting half of her concert with Anne Manson and the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra to the songs of the Reverend Gomidas (1869-1935), the father of Armenian classical music. Orchestral works by Bartók and Ravel are also featured. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 20 at 7:30.)

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Another magisterial program from James Levine and his splendid band, who will perform Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6 ("Pathétique"), Schumann's Piano



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RECITALS

AUSTRIAN CULTURAL FORUM COMPOSER SERIES
Huang Ruo, one of the most intriguing of the new crop of Asian-American composers, gets some exposure at the forum's sleek little concert hall in a program of recent work offered (twice) by the multimedia ensemble Future in Reverse. (11 E. 52nd St. Oct. 15 at 6 and 7:30. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-319-5300, ext. 222.)

ST. LUKE'S CHAMBER ENSEMBLE
This peripatetic group, which also gives concerts at the Brooklyn Museum and Dia:Beacon, alights at the Morgan Library & Museum to perform two evenings of instrumental music by Handel and Haydn (including the intimate Symphony No. 6, "Le Matin"). (Madison Ave. at 36th St. 212-685-0008. Oct. 15 and Oct. 17 at 7:30.)

BARGEMUSIC
In yet another adventurous evening at the floating chamber-music series, Joel Fan—a dexterous companion of Yo-Yo Ma in many of his Silk Road concerts—offers a half century of piano music from North and South America, including works by Piazzolla, Ginastera, Margaret Bonds, William Bolcom ("Nine New Bagatelles"), and Barber (the mighty Sonata for Piano). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. Oct. 17 at 8. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

"ITZHAK PERLMAN PLAYS CHAMBER MUSIC"
In one of his regular concerts at the Metropolitan Museum, the veteran violinist joins a passel of protégés in music for strings by Mendelssohn (the vibrant String Quintet No. 1 in A Major), Schubert, Wolf, and Dvořák (the Piano Quintet, with Yoon Jee Kim). (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. Oct. 18 at 8.)

JOY IN SINGING: JAMES RODGERS
The appealing New Zealand tenor, the winner of the organization's annual recital award, offers a concert of songs by Schumann, Milhaud, Rachmaninoff, and Weill (four of his Walt Whitman settings) at Merkin Concert Hall. (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Oct. 18 at 8.)

JORDI SAVALL AND HESPÈRION XXI
No one on the early-music scene today can command a room with the same serenity as Savall, who kicks off Lincoln Center's "Literary Muse" series with two concerts evoking the world of Cervantes. Oct. 20 at 7:30: In "Don Quijote de la Mancha: Romances y Músicas," Savall's players (joined by the soprano Montserrat Figueras and the vocalists of La Capella Reial de Catalunya) weave various *villancicos*, Sephardic ballads, and folk dances around excerpts from the novel, read by the actor F. Murray Abraham. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St.) ♦ Oct. 21 at 9: Hespèrion XXI returns to offer a "Little Night Music" program at the Kaplan Penthouse that features consort music from the period by Dowland, Gibbons, Antonio de Cabezón, and others. (Rose Building, Lincoln Center.) (212-721-6500.)

SEYMOUR LIPKIN
One of New York's most esteemed pianists celebrates the sixtieth anniversary of his winning of the Rachmaninoff Competition with a recital featuring works by Schubert (the Sonata in B-Flat Major, D. 960) and Mozart (the Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major, with three of his friends in the Juilliard String Quartet). (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. Oct. 20 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.)

MOVIES OPENING

AZUR AND ASMAR
Michel Ocelot directed this animated fable, set in the Middle Ages, about a man seeking his long-lost brother. Opening Oct. 17. (IFC Center.)

THE ELEPHANT KING
In this drama, a woman (Ellen Burstyn) sends one of her sons (Tate Ellington) to bring the other (Jonno Roberts) home from Thailand. Directed by Seth Goodman. Opening Oct. 17. (Angelika Film Center.)

FILTH AND WISDOM
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Oct. 17. (IFC Center.)

FRONTRUNNERS
A documentary, directed by Caroline Suh, about an election for class president at New York's highly selective Stuyvesant High School. Opening Oct. 15. (Film Forum.)

GOOD DICK
Marianna Palka directed and stars in this romantic comedy, about a woman who falls for the clerk (Jason Ritter) from whom she rents erotic videos. Opening Oct. 17. (Sunshine Cinema.)

MAX PAYNE
A drama, directed by John Moore, based on the video game, about a federal agent (Mark Wahlberg) and a killer (Mila Kunis) who team up to solve crimes. Opening Oct. 17. (In wide release.)

THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES
A drama, directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood, about three sisters in South Carolina (Queen Latifah, Alicia Keys, and Sophie Okonedo) who are visited by a child and her caretaker (Dakota Fanning and Jennifer Hudson). Opening Oct. 17. (In wide release.)

SEX DRIVE
Josh Zuckerman and Amanda Crew star in this comedy, directed by Sean Anders, about a teen-ager who goes on a cross-country trip to meet up with a girl. Opening Oct. 17. (In wide release.)

W.
Oliver Stone's bio-pic of George W. Bush, starring Josh Brolin, Elizabeth Banks, Thandie Newton, Richard Dreyfuss, and Jeffrey Wright. Opening Oct. 17. (In wide release.)

WHAT JUST HAPPENED
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Oct. 17. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

APPALOOSA
A well-made, satisfying, traditionalist Western with some odd quirks and turns. Virgil Cole (Ed Harris) and his deputy, Everett Hitch (Viggo Mortensen), are guns for hire in the Old West—longtime partners who communicate mainly with glances, nods, a few gnomic words, and a deepening stillness that suddenly explodes into violence. In 1882, they enter Appaloosa, a New Mexico frontier town, and offer their services to people who are being terrorized by a rapacious landowner and gang leader (Jeremy Irons). The movie offers a fresh character in Allie French (Renée Zellweger), who seems, at first, the usual refined lady from the East. She latches onto Virgil, breaking up the chaste, straightback-mountain love affair of Virgil and Hitch, but she's not quite what either man expects—that is, she's neither a wife nor a whore but a little of both. Harris, who directed, revels in the wide-open spaces and the drab, dusty little towns; the Old West comes off as a scary and melancholy place. Shot outside of Santa Fe by Dean Semler. With Timothy Spall and Ariadna Gil.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 9/29/08.) (In wide release.)

ASHES OF TIME REDUX
The Hong Kong-based director Wong Kar-Wai oversaw the restoration of his imagistic 1994 lone-swordsman spectacle, and the result is splashy, arch, and unengaging. The intricate story, based on a novel by Louis Cha, takes place in a vaguely mythical past and nests plots within plots, all of which lead back to the hermit-like killer Ouyang Feng (Leslie Cheung), who left home to seek glory. In his absence, his fiancée (Maggie Cheung) married his brother, and, having sought refuge in solitude, Ouyang now ekes out a spare living as a hit man. Wong's visuals are calculated to the millimetre to impress, but the speckles of light that pierce a wicker birdcage and the slow-motion blur of bloody sword fights have all the empty allure of a television commercial, and neither character nor drama nor acting nor even a scintilla of spontaneous invention has any place in

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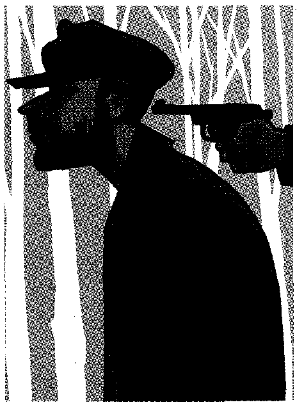
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
WAR REQUIEM

This is Andrzej Wajda season in New York. From Oct. 24 through Oct. 28, Anthology Film Archives is screening plays he filmed for Polish television, including a 1991 "Hamlet" with a female lead, and from Oct. 17 through Nov. 13 a complete retrospective is being mounted at Lincoln Center. One highlight will be the Oct. 19 showing of "Katyn" (2007), which, despite being nominated for a Best Foreign Language Film Oscar, has hardly been seen in this country (though a February release is planned). It tells the story of the Poles—some fifteen thousand in number, mostly soldiers—who were murdered by the Soviets in 1940. Or, rather, it crafts a wreath of stories around the event; some non-Polish viewers have found the result hard to follow, but the broken narrative feels appropriate. You could go in knowing nothing of the massacre and come out wanting to know everything. For years, Poland itself was forbidden to know, or to say what it knew; thus was the crime compounded. Wajda knows too much: his own father was among the dead.

—*Anthony Lane*



JASHAR AWAN

them. In Mandarin and Cantonese.—*Richard Brody* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

BALLAST

The writer-director Lance Hammer's cannily calculated independent début feature packs the melodramatic wallop of Hollywood storytelling in its low-key on-location naturalism. The absorbing story, set in a desolate patch of the Mississippi Delta in wintertime, begins obliquely, when a man is found dead, a suicide, in his modest home. What emerges is a family saga, played out on an intimate scale, involving the dead man's ex-wife (Tarra Riggs), who had taken out an order of protection against him; his teen-age son, James (JimMyron Ross), who is involved with drug dealers; and his twin brother (Micheal J. Smith, Sr.), who ran a convenience store with him but has been reduced to passivity. Though working outside the studio system and seeming to offer an alternative aesthetic, Hammer pushes every button as knowingly as a Hollywood player: each piece of his script fits as if in a mosaic; the portentous, artificially moody images serve as mere illustrations; and he gets his immensely sympathetic cast of nonactors to emote like pros. Only a stone-hearted viewer could fail to root for the central trio in their struggles against poverty and pain, but, when the lights go up, it's hard to avoid the feeling of having been taken in by formulas packaged as homemade.—*R.B.* (Film Forum.)

BLINDNESS

A man goes blind at the wheel of a car, and, one by one, the surrounding population—perhaps, who knows, the rest of the civilized world—follows suit. Whatever the cause, civilization itself begins to fray. A doctor (Mark Ruffalo), now blind, is quarantined in a secure facility, hemmed in by armed guards and forced first into proximity, and then into open discord, with a group of fellow-sufferers. The movie, written by Don McKellar and directed by Fernando Meirelles, is adapted from the novel by the Nobel laureate José Saramago, and it preserves both the bones of the plot and some of the authorial strategies—no character, for instance, is allotted a name. The book's insistence on the helpless moral numbing of society is flattened onscreen into a kind of savage dullness, and much of Meirelles's film, especially its sagging middle portion, comes across as a parable that badly wants (and badly fails) to be a story. Julianne Moore plays the doctor's wife, who can still see but neglects, for some reason, to say so. With a miscast Gael García Bernal, as the young tyrant of the blind ward, and Danny Glover, as his wise old opposite number.—*Anthony Lane* (10/6/08) (In limited release.)

BODY OF LIES

This shrewd and tightly drawn anti-terror thriller, directed by Ridley Scott, suggests that the C.I.A. has all the technical advantages but not enough of the human intelligence to combat Mideast terrorism. The field agent Roger Ferris (Leonardo DiCaprio) is just about the best there is, but his efforts on the ground are often confounded by a higher-up, Hoffman (Russell Crowe), who manages him via cell phone and laptop from the Washington suburbs. Hoffman, an American consumer of advanced technology and vast amounts of food, is too impatient; in the end, he's dependent on help from the brilliant but secretive head of Jordanian intelligence (the English actor Mark Strong, in a witty performance). The movie has the usual tropes of the genre—surveillance shots from drones, S.U.V.s tearing across the desert, explosions, scenes of torture—but Scott manages the space and timing better than most thriller directors. William Monahan adapted David Ignatius's novel. Shot in Morocco.—*D.D.* (10/13/08) (In wide release.)

THE DUCHESS

A slice from the life of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire (Keira Knightley), who, we are told, cut a swath through English high society in the second half of the eighteenth century. The swath, as represented in Saul Dibb's film, seems less than formidable; the heroine's political acumen is displayed early on, in repartee at dinner, but then left largely to wilt, and her most memorable social appearance is a drunken stagger, during which her hedge-size wig catches fire. Ralph Fiennes plays her husband in a clever and, one suspects, accurate portrayal of a chilly pragmatist bent on producing an heir. If there is dullness at the heart of the film, that may be due less to the director (though he should have cut it by a good ten minutes) than to the source material; attempts to link Georgiana's story with a broken royal marriage of more recent vintage are tendentious at best. The most diverting character is Lady Elizabeth Foster (Hayley Atwell), the Duke's mistress, who moved in to create a ménage à trois, and who should have been the heroine of this movie. Atwell is bewitching enough to have held it in her spell. With Charlotte Rampling and, as Charles James Fox, a sly Simon McBurney.—*A.L.* (In wide release.)

EAGLE EYE

A sloppy but entertaining technology-gone-wild thriller, about a slacker (Shia LaBeouf) who teams up with a threatened mom (Michelle Monaghan) when they receive sinister instructions from a disembodied voice. The film, directed by D. J. Caruso, is packed with action sequences that recall hits of the past (such as "North by Northwest" and "Enemy of the State") and are so swiftly and energetically staged that their familiarity is almost welcome. The twists and turns of the plot (whom the two protagonists are running from, what they're doing) are more manufactured than written, but Caruso and the host of screenwriters craft the film's theme of paranoid surveillance for speed, not plausibility. They fail to say anything Orwellian about the times we live in; the hectic overplotting is so consumer-driven that it nearly devours itself.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

FLASH OF GENIUS

In the past, the affable effortlessness of Greg Kinnear's performances successfully masked the nuanced actor's tightly focussed range. In this film, Kinnear gets around his amiable veneer in the role of the electrical engineer Robert Kearns, who developed the intermittent windshield wiper and spent years fighting the big automakers for recognition. Kinnear plays him as a stubborn idealist, obsessive and anxious in his pursuit for justice, and his performance holds the story together. But the film, directed by Marc Abraham and written by Philip Railsback (based on a *New Yorker* article by John Seabrook), is slow going. It's so meticulous about getting the David-vs.-Goliath atmosphere right that it neglects to build any real drama. For all Kearns's heroic sacrifices and heartbreaking missteps, the film offers only a muted sense of the man, whom it turns audience-friendly for only a moment of triumph.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

GENERAL IDI AMIN DADA

The director Barbet Schroeder puts the emphasis on the Dada in this casually hair-raising 1974 documentary portrait of the Ugandan dictator, which provided a model for Forest Whitaker's robust, horrifying portrayal of the man in "The Last King of Scotland." In the epitome of give-him-enough-rope moviemaking, Schroeder lets his subject reveal himself in all his bizarre infamy, whether unveiling "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" as his guidebook to Jewish history (he later demonstrates with his military how he would retake the Golan Heights) or announcing a project to send food and money to Great Britain, in what may be a conscious parody of paternal colonialism. This general has no superego, but he certainly has a super ego; in mass scenes that he staged for Schroeder, he presents himself as the living spirit of his country. He makes sure his citizens know what's good for them: better swimmers let him beat them across the pool.—*Michael Sragow* (BAM; Oct. 18.)

GHOST TOWN

David Koepp, the co-writer of some of Steven Spielberg's biggest hits, turns the volume down to direct this romantic comedy, which breaks a cardinal rule of the genre: there's no kissing. Ricky Gervais stars as Bertram Pincus, a misanthropic dentist who, after a medical accident, sees ghosts—one of whom, the spirit of a philandering husband (Greg Kinnear), recruits Bertram to break up the engagement of his widow (Téa Leoni). The spry and lively screenplay, brought to life in clean New York locations, gives the actors plenty of moments to sparkle, and Koepp crafts small, sharp scenes as if he's conducting a pirouette. The film's touch of sentimentality makes it seem like a throwback to a gentler era, but Gervais tempers it with his faultless, cranky timing—no one does insecure grandiosity better. With Billy Campbell, Aasif Mandvi, and a scene-stealing Kristen Wiig.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

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HAPPY-GO-LUCKY
Poppy (Sally Hawkins), the single, thirty-year-old London schoolteacher in Mike Leigh's comedy, bounces on a trampoline after school, but she doesn't need much of a lift—she's already airborne. Is possession of the happiness gene enough to get you through life without harm? Or, putting it less grandly, can a woman as cheerful as Poppy serve as the protagonist of a full-length movie? Leigh, who directs with a carefree assurance (after much rehearsal with the actors) matches his heroine against a series of adversaries—an iron-willed flamenco dancer, a bully boy in her class, a driving instructor (Eddie Marsan) who is so rule-bound that he's choking with rage—all of whom try to overcome unhappiness by behaving as aggressively or living as rigidly as possible. The movie is not an argument for chaos; it's an argument for making one's way through life with a relaxed will and an open heart. With Alexis Zegerman as Poppy's dyspeptic roommate.—*D.D.* (10/13/08) (In wide release.)

LAKEVIEW TERRACE
Neil LaBute's latest film, written by David Loughery and Howard Korder, is hard to place. It begins as a seething social drama, with the arrival of a mixed-race couple (Patrick Wilson and Kerry Washington) in a placid, law-abiding corner of Los Angeles. Here they bump up against their next-door neighbor, Abel Turner (Samuel L. Jackson), a policeman of implacable pride and prejudice. Jackson revels in the role, lording it over the other characters and turning the tale into a comedy of aggression and unease; you can sense the pleasure that he and LaBute derive from jostling the audience's racial attitudes. It's a shame, then, that the latter stages of the movie let us off the hook, settling for the contrivances and showdowns of a standard thriller; the setup seemed both more potent and more plausible when it was allowed to simmer. With Regine Nehy, who plays Abel's teen-age daughter with a perfect blend of languor and defiance, and who deserves to go far.—*A.L.* (9/22/08) (In wide release.)

MARY
Abel Ferrara's pulp-thin, violence-haunted view of Jesus in media is a clever yet artificial construction that ultimately converges to spiritual banalities. Tony Childress (Matthew Modine), a streetwise director, stars in his own version of the life of Jesus, "This Is My Blood," co-starring Marie Palesi (Juliette Binoche) as Mary Magdalene, whose apocryphal gospel is the core of Childress's film. After the shooting ends, Marie, still possessed by her character's visions, abandons her career and heads for Jerusalem. A year later, the film arouses protest and a TV journalist, Ted Younger (Forest Whitaker), at work on his own series, "Jesus, the Real Story," wants Tony to appear on his show. He also wants Marie to take part; by pure coincidence, the actress is the best friend of a woman (Marion Cotillard) with whom he's cheating on his pregnant wife (Heather Graham). The setup is long and intricate, but, though Ferrara's ambitious plans may be admirable, his bland, unimaginative images do little to realize them, and his personal view of Christian love seems all too simplistic: Heaven on earth seems to lie somewhere between Norman Rockwell and weekend retreats at a feminist shaman's commune.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; Oct. 17-23.)

NICK AND NORAH'S INFINITE PLAYLIST
The core of this low-key teen romantic comedy, set in New York's indie-rock scene, is the chemistry of Michael Cera and Kat Dennings, who star as a pair of New Jersey high-school seniors, a heartbroken bassist and a recording-studio heiress, who are thrown together for an evening and discover their deeper connections. The story, turning on the quest for a band's secret show, swings between the authentically tender and the dully mechanical, but Peter Sollett's unintrusive direction gives the actors space to shine. Cera's line delivery is a national treasure, as he wrenches phrases from diffident silences to suggest a range of unexpressed thoughts beneath them, and Dennings speaks with a grounded intelligence that seems ready-made for the world that Woody Allen made famous. The scripted romance is sweet, charming, and realistic in tone, but its didactic elements (the evils of alcohol, the pointlessness of mere lust) allow for none of the acerbity and ambiguity of "Superbad," and it's undercut by the plot's implausible complications; still, some may agree with the movie's endorsement of shared musical taste as the touchstone of compatibility.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

"Max Payne," based on the video game, opens Oct. 17.

ANNETTE MARNAT

NIGHTS AND WEEKENDS
The Chicago resident Joe Swanberg and the New York-based Greta Gerwig directed and star in this "mumblecore" romantic drama as James, a videogame designer who lives in Chicago, and Maddie, a New York nursing student who writes in her spare time. In the opening long take, as they enter James's apartment, they strip each other in a minute and nineteen seconds, giving rise to a performance by Swanberg that is hard to fake. The humid intimacy makes clear what the filmmakers think love is based on, but what soon strains the couple's long-distance bond is their absence from the wider web of each other's lives. As portrayed by the inventive Gerwig, Maddie, who is whimsically articulate and quietly tempestuous, is in command of the relationship; Swanberg makes James merely a man—stolid, ambitious, capable, sentimental, and self-absorbed. The seemingly improvised dialogue and unblocked staging lend emotional weight to their fleeting glances and sudden gestures, and such moments as a brief, inspired, tender streetside dance blossom exquisitely in real time. Gerwig and Swanberg rely heavily on their cameraman, who sometimes gets close enough to celebrate their beautiful imperfections but usually keeps the onscreen couple at a poignant distance and in ambiguous equilibrium; their raw, highly personalized methods convey the sense that the lives depicted on camera and those lived behind it are one.—*R.B.* (IFC Center.)

RACHEL GETTING MARRIED
The new Jonathan Demme film is one of his slighter and more oddball affairs. It stars Anne Hathaway as Kym, who leaves rehab—where she is being treated for drug addiction—to attend the wedding of her sister Rachel (Rosemarie DeWitt). This takes place at the family home in Connecticut, which has become, for the occasion, a multiethnic menagerie of liberal optimists, many bearing musical instruments. Not surprisingly, the festive air is spoiled by the intrusion of Kym, who feels constrained by her protective father (Bill Irwin) and then flashes into fearsome combat with her mother (Debra Winger). The movie is too long, and often wearying to watch, taking its visual cues from the unappeasable restlessness of the heroine. Yet the scene in which she is welcomed home, after a car accident, to be bathed and consoled by her sister without a word has a real, if exhausted, tenderness; the smarting emotions on show here are seldom contrived, and anyone versed in family conflict—that is, anyone with a family—will flinch at those moments when Demme cuts close to the bone.—*A.L.* (10/6/08) (In limited release.)

RELIGULOUS
This documentary, in which the libertarian comedian and talk-show host Bill Maher, along with the director Larry Charles, challenges the legitimacy of religion, is a globe-trotting conversation starter. Maher's softhearted satirical dig at faith and the people who espouse it focusses primarily on literal interpretations of Bible stories (such as those of Noah's ark and Jonah and the whale). His interview technique isn't argumentative—he sees religion as anti-rational—and his comedy plays out as frustration rather than as mean-spiritedness. The filmmakers have smartly chosen to film in locations where the faithful gather, and the film benefits from its you-are-there style. In an odd note of irony, the film is, in effect, preaching to the unconverted.—*B.D.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

ROCKNROLLA
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

SALLY OF THE SAWDUST
D. W. Griffith, the father of the cinema, was also a son of the theatre, and in this rowdy yet sweet-toned comic melodrama of carnival life, from 1925, he yoked the cinema's youth to the age-old lore of the wandering trouper. The wide-eyed, impulsive Carol Dempster stars in the title role as a circus orphan, born in the proverbial trunk to a Connecticut heiress who ran off with a showman and was disowned. Raised by "Professor" McGargle (W. C. Fields, in his first starring role in a feature, before his shtick became sour-pickled), an itinerant magician, juggler, pickpocket, and shell-game sharper with a heart of gold, Sally becomes his whimsical, resourceful, and fiercely devoted sidekick—and thinks she's his daughter. Griffith takes full advantage of his actors' slapstick aptitude, combining the low humor of movie pioneers with a dramatic romance involving an upright scion (the stage star Alfred Lunt, in one of his few film appearances) who perceives, through Sally's greasepaint and antics, her noble nature. Disturbingly realistic scenes of the two artistes scuffling along train tracks for want of fare contrast with the near-metaphysical transfiguration of Sally into a grande dame for a salon entertainment. Griffith rarely displayed

the scope of his genius as comprehensively or as generously. Silent.—*R.B.* (MOMA; Oct. 20.)

SEVEN MEN FROM NOW

Budd Boetticher's stark 1956 Western offers a Hemingwayesque intensity of unspoken emotion and bitter wisdom and a visually terse style to match. Before you blink, two of the seven men are already gunned down by Stride (Randolph Scott), the former sheriff of Silver Springs, Colorado, who trawls the desert for the bandits who killed his wife, a Wells Fargo clerk, in a robbery. But the chest full of gold they stole is still missing, and Masters (Lee Marvin), a criminal whom Stride had put away twice, is after it. Meanwhile, John and Annie Greer (Walter Reed and Gail Russell), two Easterners on their way to California whose wagon gets stuck in mud, are rescued by Stride, who falls for Annie but doesn't act on it. In Boetticher's harshly judgmental view, the lawless and barren landscape proves the humanity of some but dehumanizes others: the crazed robbers pursuing Stride scuttle among rocks like scorpions, while the wounded hero, as embodied by the huge yet delicate Scott, moves with a dancer's proud grace.—*R.B.* (Thalia Theatre; Oct. 19.)

Also Playing

THE EXPRESS: In wide release. **THE LUCKY ONES:** In wide release. **MIRACLE AT ST. ANNA:** In wide release. **NIGHTS IN RODANTHE:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"Audio Vérité Presents." Oct. 15 at 7:30: "Espace Ouverte: Portraits de Malcolm Goldstein" (2007-08, Thierry Collins), followed by a performance by the violinist Goldstein. ♦ Special screenings. Oct. 17 and Oct. 20-23 at 7 and 9 and Oct. 18-19 at 5, 7, and 9: "Mary" (†). ♦ "Essential Cinema." Oct. 11 at 5:30: Short films by Jordan Belson, Bruce Baillie, and Douglass Crockwell.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Through Oct. 21: The films of Barbet Schroeder. Oct. 15 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Valley" (1972). ♦ Oct. 16 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Chinese Roulette" (1976, Rainer Werner Fassbinder; in German). ♦ Oct. 17 at 7:30: "Inju, the Beast in the Shadow" (2008). The screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ Oct. 18 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "General Idi Amin Dada" (†). ♦ Oct. 19 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Koko, the Talking Gorilla" (1978). ♦ Oct. 20 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Our Lady of the Assassins" (2000). ♦ Oct. 21 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Murder by Numbers" (2002). ♦ Oct. 21 at 6:50: "Single White Female" (1992).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Oct. 15-30 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10: "Lola Montès" (1955, Max Ophüls; in French and German).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—I Kiffe NY: French Urban Cultures Festival. Oct. 21 at 12:30 and 7: "Dans la Vie" (2008, Philippe Faucon; in French). ♦ Oct. 21 at 4: "La Petite Jérusalem" (2005, Karin Albou; in French).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Waverly Midnights." Oct. 17-18: "The Shining" (1980, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Oct. 21 at 8: Films by the director George Stoney, who will introduce the program.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Hollywood on the Hudson: Filmmaking in New York, 1920-39." Oct. 15 at 6: "The Talk of Hollywood" (1929, Mark Sandrich). ♦ Oct. 15 at 8:30 and Oct. 19 at 3:30: "Into the Net" (George Seitz, 1924; silent). ♦ Oct. 17 at 4:15: "Tango in Broadway" (1934, Louis Gasnier). ♦ Oct. 17 at 6:30: "Moonlight and Pretzels" (1933, Karl Freund). ♦ Oct. 17 at 8:15: "Crime Without Passion" (1934, Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur). ♦ Oct. 18 at 2: "Dudley Murphy on American Music," including "St. Louis Blues" (1929) and "Black and Tan" (1929). ♦ Oct. 18 at 4: "One Third of a Nation" (1939, Murphy). ♦ Oct. 18 at 6: "Intolerance of 1933 (Victims of Persecution)" (1933, Bud Pollard). ♦ Oct. 18 at 7:30: "Back Door to Heaven" (1939, William K. Howard). ♦ Oct. 19 at 1:30: "Crime Without Passion" (1934, Hecht). ♦ Oct. 19 at 5:30: "East Coast Animation." ♦ "Ken Jacobs: Filmmaker Extraordinaire." Oct. 16 at 6:15, Oct. 17 at 6, Oct. 18 at 1, Oct. 19 at 2, and Oct. 20 at 2: "Return to the Scene of the Crime" (2008). ♦ Oct. 16 at 8: Short-film program, including "Nymph" (2007). ♦ Oct. 17 at 8 and Oct. 19 at 4: "Razzle Dazzle, the Lost World" (2006–07). ♦ Oct. 18 at 3: "Star Spangled to Death" (1956–60/2003–04). ♦ "Batiste Madalena and the Cinema of the 1920s." Oct. 20 at 6: "Sally of the Sawdust" (†). ♦ Oct. 20 at 8:30: "Hotel Imperial" (1927, Mauritz Stiller; silent).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—"Cabaret Cinema." Oct. 17 at 9:30: "The Story of Qiu Ju" (1992, Zhang Yimou; in Mandarin), introduced by Tinling Choong.

THALIA THEATRE

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Through Nov. 2: "Paul Schrader's Personal

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Choice." Oct. 19 at 4 and 8: "Seven Men from Now" (†). ♦ Oct. 19 at 5:30: "Affliction" (1997, Schrader).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—The films of Andrzej Wajda. All films are in Polish. Oct. 17 and Oct. 19 at 1: "A Generation" (1955). ♦ Oct. 17 at 2:45 and Oct. 19 at 4:50: "Ashes and Diamonds" (1958). ♦ Oct. 17 at 4:45: "The Maids of Wilko" (1979). ♦ Oct. 17 at 7:30: "The Promised Land" (1975). ♦ Oct. 18 at 6:30: "Everything for Sale" (1969). ♦ Oct. 18 at 9:00: "Landscape After Battle" (1970). ♦ Oct. 19 at 2:50 and Oct. 20 at 2: "Kanal" (1957). ♦ Oct. 19 at 7:30: "Katyn" (2007). ♦ Oct. 20 at 8 and Oct. 21 at 2: "Lotna" (1959). ♦ Oct. 21 at 4: "Innocent Sorcerers" (1960).

READINGS AND TALKS

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
Ellen Burstyn, Brian Cox, Linus Roache, and others give a dramatic reading based on the Dhammapada, a central text of Buddhism. (150 W. 17th St. 212-620-5000, ext. 344. Oct. 15 at 7.)

UNION HALL
Jay McInerney, Kate Christensen, and Arthur Phillips read short stories they have published on FiveChapters.com, a Web site that serializes a new short story every week in daily installments. (702 Union St., Park Slope. 718-638-4400. Oct. 15 at 7:30.)

NATIONAL ARTS CLUB
Ben Greenman, an editor at this magazine, reads from "Correspondences," his new collection of stories about letters and letter writing, and the novelist John Reed reads from his latest book, "All the World's a Grave: A New Play by William Shakespeare." (15 Gramercy Park S. No tickets necessary. Oct. 17 at 7.)

PARSONS SCHOOL OF DESIGN
Breyten Breytenbach, Colum McCann, Suheir Hammad, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, Susan Kuklin, and others read from their work to benefit PEN's Prison Writing Program. (66 Fifth Ave. For more information, visit www.pen.org. Oct. 20 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

HAROLD CLURMAN FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS
The Stella Adler Studio of Acting's annual gathering gets under way on Oct. 17, with a symposium at Cooper Union's Great Hall (7 E. 7th St.) about art and social activism in Africa, featuring Winter Miller, John Prendergast, Nima Elbagir, and others. It is followed by more than a week of music, drama, dance, and discussion, mostly at the studio itself (31 W. 27th St., 3rd fl.). The festival closes back at the Great Hall with Whoopi Goldberg, Rosie Perez, Phylicia Rashad, Anna Deavere Smith, and others holding forth on the topic of art and educational justice. (For more information, visit www.stellaadler.com. Through Oct. 27.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
The photography extravaganza continues. The British rare-books auction house **Bloomsbury** holds its first sale of photographs in New York (Oct. 17), a wide-ranging affair that includes such enticements as a group of nineteenth-century photographic albums documenting an expedition through Siberia and the Urals, digital images such as the cover lot, "World #7," by Ruud Van Empel (from his "Moon World Venus" series), and Peter Hujar's image of Susan Sontag from 1975, in which her body lies in repose, her face illuminated by thought. (6 W. 48th St. 212-719-1000.) ♦ **Phillips's** photograph auction (Oct. 16) contains a series of works by Robert Mapplethorpe from the collection of the pioneering bodybuilder Lisa Lyon (a close friend), depicting Lyon as femme fatale, snake charmer, dominatrix, and sportswoman. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.) ♦ **Swann,** too, offers a selection of photographs from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Oct. 21) that includes a beautiful curiosity: a shot of three Isadora Duncan-style performers from the Marion Morgan Dancers troupe in languorous poses, by Edward Weston and Margrethe Mather. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.) ♦ The stars of **Christie's** jewelry sales (Oct. 15) are two rather imposing gems, weighing in at a whopping 102.11 and 70.87 carats, respectively, and known as the "Ponhalo Diamonds." The house then turns to European decorative arts in two sales, on Oct. 17 and Oct. 20. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Sotheby's** offers its own cavalcade of European decorative arts, with George II desks and chairs (among other furniture items) on Oct. 11, all manner of silver objects (including delightful musical snuffboxes) on Oct. 17, and a large group of nineteenth-century furnishings and sculpture from the estate of the gallerist Rochelle Sepenuk on Oct. 21. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)

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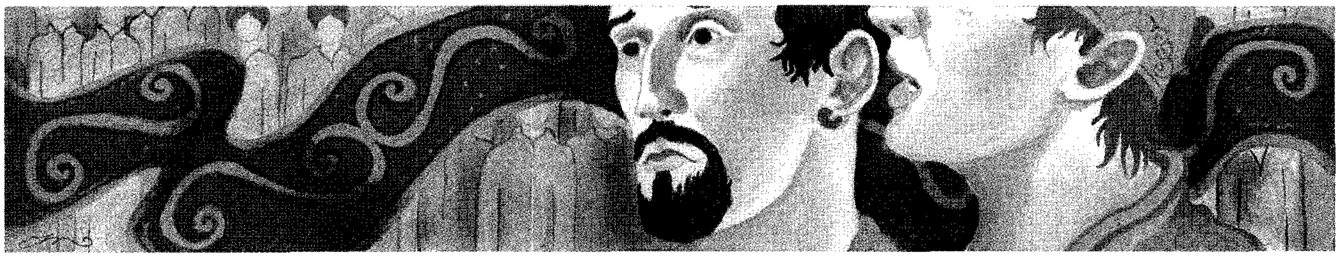
Visit the Goings On blog, at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson, for additional cultural coverage and commentary.



JORGE MASCARENHAS

ON THE HORIZON

ART
THE LONG GOODBYE
Oct. 24–Feb. 1

The Met bids a fond farewell to its director of thirty-one years with "The Philippe de Montebello Years: Curators Celebrate Three Decades of Acquisitions." The exhibition features some three hundred objects, including a sixteenth-century Islamic manuscript that illustrates "worldly and otherworldly drunkenness," a charcoal drawing by Gauguin from 1899, and Jasper Johns's "White Flag" from 1955. (212-535-7710.)

THE THEATRE
MAMET MANIA
Oct. 31

"American Buffalo," the second David Mamet play to be revived this season (the first is "Speed-the-Plow"), arrives at the Belasco, starring Cedric the Entertainer, John Leguizamo, and Haley Joel Osment as three men who plot to steal a rare coin. (212-239-6200.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
LOVE AND WAR
Nov. 5 and Nov. 7–8

Douglas J. Cuomo is famous for the theme for "Sex and the City," but his range is wide. BAM presents the New York première of "Arjuna's Dilemma," a music-theatre piece inspired by the tale of the warrior prince from the Bhagavad Gita. (718-636-4100.)

NIGHT LIFE
ORDER IN THE COURT
Nov. 6–15

The thorny troubadour Ed Hamell, who performs under the name Hamell on Trial, bridges the gap between folk and funk with his urgently strummed amplified acoustic guitar and his acidic lyrics. He has a five-night residency at the Bowery Poetry Club next month. (212-614-0505.)

MOVIES
FRANK AND STONES
Nov. 7–16

The Swiss photographer Robert Frank issued his seminal book, "The Americans," fifty years ago, and then turned to filmmaking. Anthology Film Archives offers a retrospective of Frank's films and videos, including "Pull My Daisy," based on a play by Jack Kerouac, and a rare screening of his notorious backstage documentary about the Rolling Stones, "Cocksucker Blues," from 1972. (212-505-5181.)

Douglas J. Cuomo's "Arjuna's Dilemma," at BAM.

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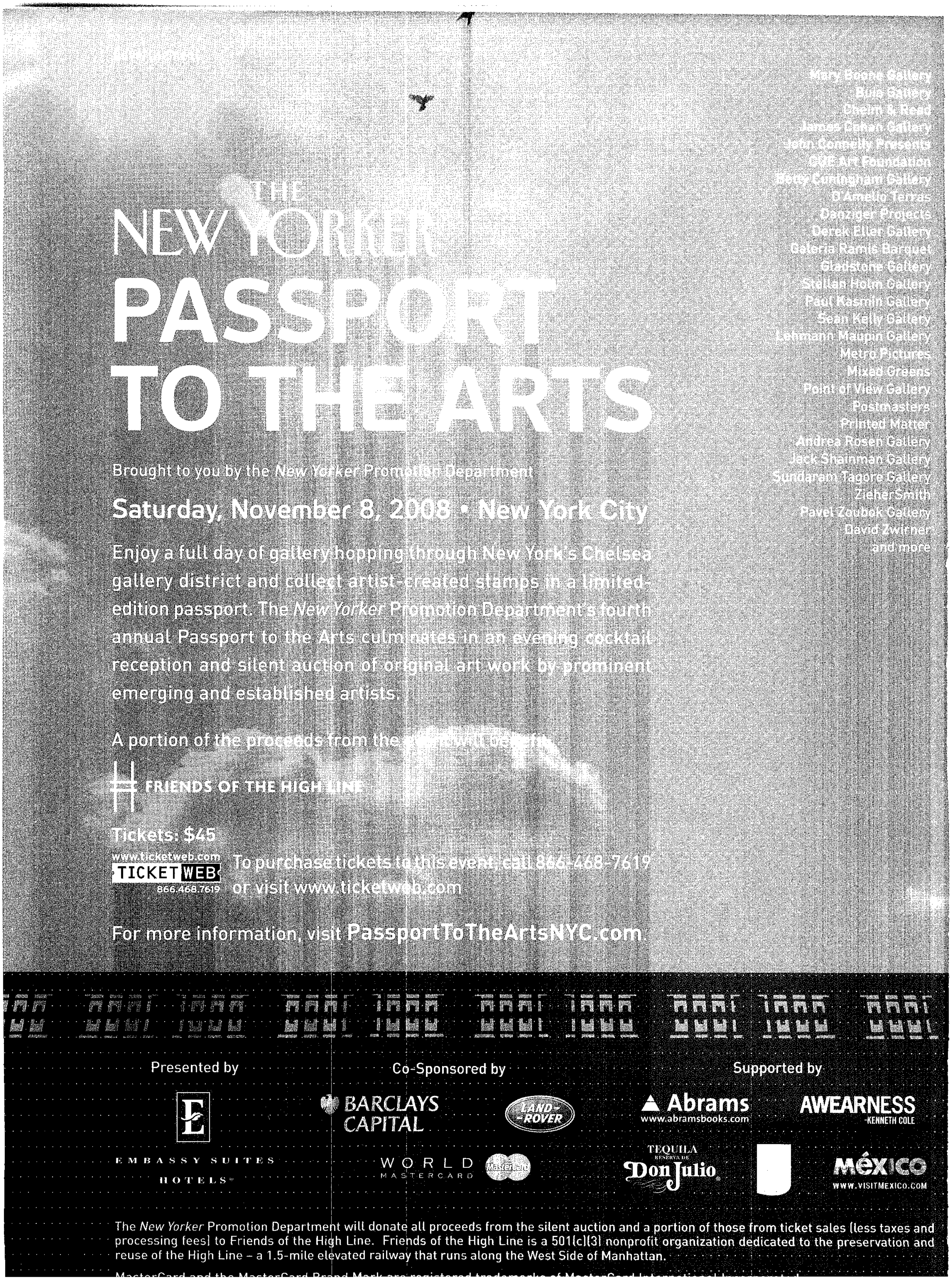

THE NEW YORKER

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THE NEW YORKER

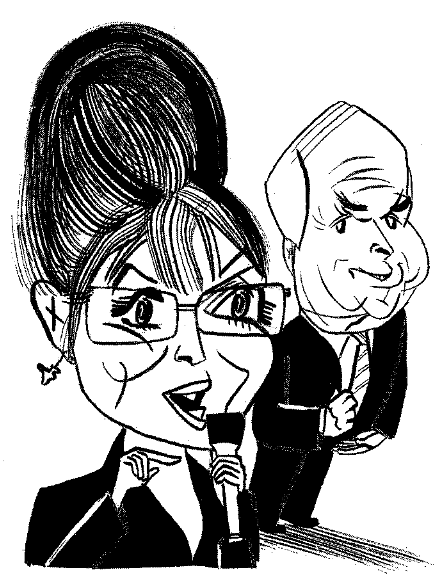
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
BEYOND THE PALIN

Format isn't everything. John McCain's campaign specialty has been the "town hall," where the candidate wanders the stage, microphone in hand, answering questions from ordinary citizens and bantering with them. So his staff was happy that his second debate with Barack Obama, which took place last Tuesday evening, in Nashville, Tennessee, was structured according to his favorite style. McCain's town meetings have been one-man shows, based on a relationship between candidate and audience that falls somewhere between that of a celebrity to his fans and that of a king to his subjects—one important man and a roomful of the little people. But the dynamic changed when a second important man, particularly one who was elegantly calm and self-assured, was added to the mix. Afterward, in CNN's poll of independent debate-watchers, fifty-four per cent thought Obama came out on top, while thirty per cent picked McCain as the winner. A congenial set of rules, it seems, can't offset a talented opponent, much less a worldwide financial panic.

The Nashville town hall was an interlude of comparative comity, sandwiched between moldy slices of slander. Early in the general-election campaign, Obama was accused, for example, of favoring "painful tax increases on working American families," when in fact his tax hike would apply only to family incomes of more than a quarter million dollars a year. Perhaps that could be dismissed as a routine political stretcher. But Obama was also portrayed as a libertine who demanded that kindergartners be exposed to explicit descriptions of sexual intercourse (when in fact he proposed only to teach them to recognize inappropriate advances) and as a sexist boor who called the Republican Vice-Presidential nominee a pig (when in fact he used a common simile that his opponent had a habit of using himself). None of this quite amounted to suggesting that the Democrat is a traitor or a facilitator of terror. That came after the financial crisis began and Obama took a small but persistent lead in the opinion polls.

Early this month, McCain moved nearly his entire advertising budget into negative territory. But "negative" hardly does justice to the mendacity of the campaign of vilification that bracketed Nashville. "Barack Obama has said that all we're doing in Afghanistan is air-raiding villages and killing civilians," Sarah Palin said the week before. "Such a reckless, reckless comment and untrue comment, again, hurts our cause." McCain's wife, Cindy—who, in May, had said, "My husband is absolutely opposed to any negative campaigning at all"—told a rally last week, "The day that Senator Obama decided to cast a vote to not fund my son while he was serving sent a cold chill through my body." A McCain television spot summed up the line of attack:



> Who is Barack Obama? He says our troops in Afghanistan are [Obama's voice] "just air-raiding villages and killing civilians." How dishonorable. Congressional liberals voted repeatedly to cut off funding to our active troops, increasing the risk on their lives. How dangerous. Obama and congressional liberals. Too risky for America.

Here is what Obama actually said, fourteen months ago: "We've got to get the job done there, and that requires us to have enough troops so that we're not just air-raiding villages and killing civilians, which is causing enormous pressure over there." He was calling for reinforcements, not casting aspersions. And, as McCain must know, the one Senate vote on which the charge of defunding the troops is based has a mirror image. In May of 2007, Obama voted against a troop-funding bill because it did not include steps toward withdrawal from Iraq; two months earlier, McCain had voted against one

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

because it did. In neither case did their parliamentary maneuverings pose the slightest risk to the life of a single soldier.

Enter Bill Ayers, the former Weatherman, now a college professor and a pillar of the Chicago education-reform establishment. Palin again, a few days ago: “Our opponent is someone who sees America as imperfect enough to pal around with terrorists who targeted their own country.” At the end of the nineteen-sixties, when Bill Ayers was a leader of the New Left’s most destructive, self-destructive, and delusional splinter, Barack Obama was a small boy living with his mother in Indonesia. The fact that thirty years later Obama and Ayers sat on a couple of the same nonprofit boards tells us no more about Obama’s politics and character than does the fact that another member of one of those boards was Arnold R. Weber, the former president of the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago and a donor of fifteen hundred dollars to the McCain campaign. Ayers and Obama are not now, nor have they ever been, pals.

The Obama campaign has been spending money on negativity, too, of course—about a third of its advertising outlay. And a few of their ads have been purposely misleading. For example, an Obama radio spot says of McCain, “He’s opposed stem-cell research.” (That too-clever use of a contraction allows the line to be more truthy than true: McCain flip-flopped on embryonic-stem-cell research in 2001.) But there is no equivalence between the two campaigns. If there were, Obama’s ads would be “raising questions” about the other ticket’s “associations.” For example, Todd Palin was a registered member of the Alaskan Independence Party—to which his wife, as governor, has sent friendly greetings—between 1995 and 2002. Four years before Todd joined, the A.I.P.’s founder, Joe Vogler, declared, “The fires of hell are frozen glaciers compared to my hatred for the American government,” and added, referring to the Stars and Stripes, “I won’t be buried under their damned flag!” (Sure enough, in 1995, Vogler, after being murdered in connection with an informal transaction involving plastic explosives, was buried in Canada.) Good material for an attack ad there, no? Ditto the fact that during the early nineteen-eighties John McCain sat on the advisory board of General John Singlaub’s U.S. Council for World Freedom—the American outpost of the World Anti-Communist League, a sort of clearing house for former Nazi collaborators, Central American death-squad leaders, and assorted international thugs. And, unlike Obama’s alleged palship with Ayers, these things are true.

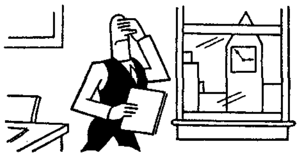
The Obama campaign hasn’t gone there, for which it deserves no special credit; it has more to gain from sticking to the realities of the economy and the war. But the other side has been late in having second thoughts. This became frighteningly obvious in recent days, as the rallies McCain and Palin have held around the country turned into blood-curdling hate-fests. The shouts of supporters in response to the candidates’ attacks on Obama—“Traitor!” “Terrorist!” “Kill him!”—were uttered without rebuke. On CNN the other night, Anderson Cooper asked David Gergen, the soul of moderate concerned citizenship, about “all this anger out there.” Gergen replied, “We’ve seen it in a Palin rally. We saw it at the McCain rally today. . . . There is this free-floating sort of whipping-around anger that could really lead to some violence. I think we’re not far from that.” Suddenly, McCain seems to be worried, too. “I admire Senator Obama and his accomplishments,” he told a restive crowd in Lakeville, Minnesota, last Friday. “I will respect him, and I want everyone to be respectful.” The crowd—the mob—booed. If McCain loses, or even if he wins, his campaign will be remembered as a tragedy in the Aristotelian sense, in which a hero is ruined through some terrible choice of his own. One can only hope that the tragedy will be his alone, and not the nation’s.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

“That’s right—own your accidents.”

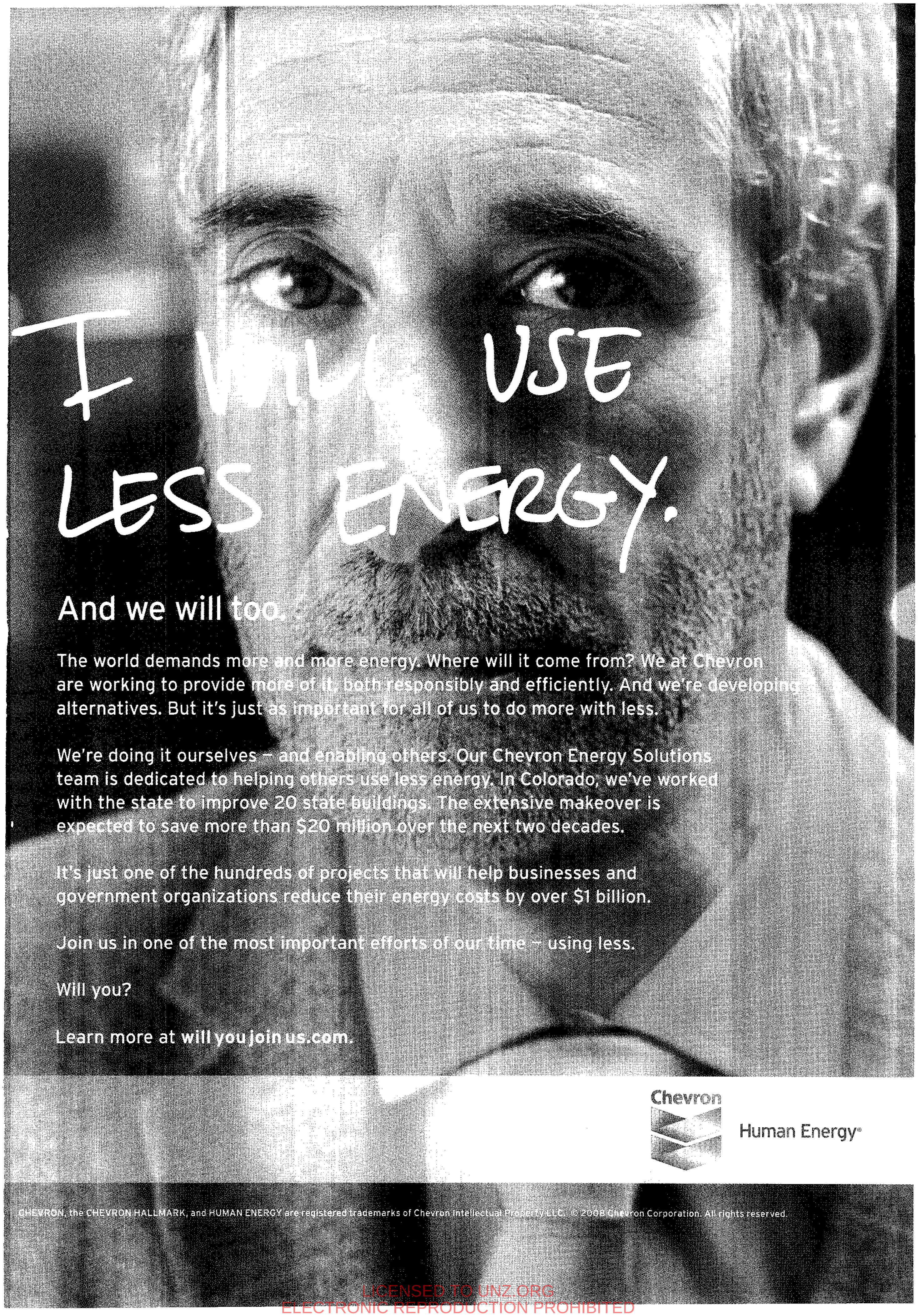
DEPT. OF FINANCE

FREEZE!



At ten o’clock Wednesday night, the banker lingered in his office. He was a top-ranking executive at a major global financial institution (he did not want to be identified, because, well, he did not want to be identified), and he had been at work for sixteen hours, monitoring the collapse of the world’s financial system. The credit markets were frozen, the equity markets in free fall. The term of the hour was “nuclear winter”—nothing moves or grows—a doomsday scenario that a series of government interventions had so far failed to preclude, owing to a pernicious convergence of intractability and incompetence. He spoke quietly and without affect, a skyscraper general surveying his Verdun: “We’re pretty creditworthy, and we can’t borrow. There is nothing to borrow. Long-term lenders are not lending. There is no bond issuance. No asset-backed. No unsecured. Nothing. Nobody trusts anybody.”

Interbank lending is the photosynthesis of finance. In its absence, the money dries up, and the viability of everything—institutions, assets, jobs, budgets, plans, dreams—wilts. Hoarding is panic’s quiet twin. In Germany, frightened investors, with Weimar on the brain, couldn’t even find gold to buy. Last week, the global economy, struggling to agree on a price for its components, in an environment without leverage or liquidity, found pretty much everything (except gold bars and Phillies tickets) to be worth a lot less than everyone thought. Your house, your billfold, your portfolio, your clout, your talent: market to market, these will, apparently, fetch a fraction of what you’d



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expected or depended upon. As haircuts go, this is a scalping.

In order to have something to hoard, people had to find things to sell. So they sold stocks. The Dow—to pick on one bloody indicator—gave up twenty-one per cent in seven days, and forty per cent in a year. As for the American equity market in general—$8.4 trillion gone in the past year. In some respects, though, the stock-market collapse is a sideshow. The credit crunch is the main event.

Another thing not being hoarded, besides stocks, was blame. The volume on that exchange was at an all-time high. Greenspan, Paulson, the F.D.I.C., the S.E.C., the poor, the rich, the right, the left. Phil Gramm, Barney Frank. Carter, Reagan, Clinton, Bush, Obama, McCain, Steinbrenner, Torre. The banker was particularly bedevilled by the regulators. "The regulators are all over the banks," he said. "They've gone from not caring about anything to caring about the wrong things, in volume.

"Deleveraging was proceeding very well for nine months," he went on, referring to the process, common among American corporations and consumers, of reducing debt. "Then, in June, the balance sheet got out of kilter. The Fed was trying to convince itself that the market was strong enough to solve the problems on its own. They decided to try a human experiment, a live experiment. They decided to let Lehman fail. It was an experiment that went horribly wrong. They won't do that again."

Amid the recalibration, everybody is in play, even as nobody moves: bedrock corporations face bankruptcy, seizure, or sale; putative winners fight over the carcasses of the losers; debtors and stakeholders, in a squeeze and a fright, scramble to liquidate; soon-to-be-laid-off investment bankers test the job market and scare up offers that are measly, by their outsized standards, but better than nothing.

"Markets are about travelling, not arriving," the banker said, mysteriously. So let us travel through time. "In the past, in difficult times, Americans just worked harder," he went on. "But there aren't enough hours in the day, or enough incentives to work harder, and there's nothing to work *on*. People, in the end, will find a way to work their way out of it. They'll pay down their debts. They'll have to. And then everyone will get bored with doom and gloom and dip their toes in again.

"Still, this one is so bad. After 9/11, it took people only six months to get stupid. This time, it will take ten years for people to become stupid again." He continued, "America will just be less influential. It will be poorer. It may be the end of the empire." Another call came in. Work to be done—whatever it might be. "But it isn't the end of the world."

—*Nick Paumgarten*

POSTCARD FROM JAPAN
CAMPAIGN '08 ABROAD

Fukui is a prefecture divided. On the one hand, it is home to Obama, a rustic fishing village on the Sea of Japan. (*Obama* means "little beach.") On the other, its capital city—two hours from Obama on the commuter train—is a Republican stronghold: Fukui City, where Sarah Palin's rimless gray titanium eyeglasses are made.

Obama, a quaint outpost known for its temples, mackerel, and lacquerware, has emerged as a hub of Barack Obama activism. Last winter, in preparation for Super Tuesday, Seiji Fujihara, the secretary-general of the Obama for Obama Support Group, asked his friend Mr. Adachi, a sometime graphic designer, to draw an image of the Senator. Adachi is no Shepard Fairey, but his image of Obama, sketched in ten minutes—cropped hair, jumbo ears, set in a "Presidential" seal under the motto "I ♥ Obama"—is as prevalent on the streets of Obama as Fairey's posters are in Northeastern cities. Support-group members also recorded a theme song, "Obama Is Beautiful World"—"The sea spreading far out and the bright sunshine reflect the future of your country, America. . . . / La-la-la-la-la Obama! / Obama is beautiful world! / Obama is No. 1!"—which seemingly owes a debt to the opening measures of the Village People's "Y.M.C.A." Another friend of Fujihara's, a plumber, sculpted a bust of Obama, microphone in hand, and wrapped a traditional Japanese sash around its head.

The bust stands at the entrance to the support group's war room, a coffee bar and souvenir shop whose wares include Adachi-designed T-shirts, along with chopsticks, kites, and steamed cakes filled with sweet adzuki beans. Grill marks on the bean cakes depict the back of Obama's head. "We thought it was not appropriate to have Mr. Obama's face without his consent, since these are for sale," Fujihara said. So far, thirteen hundred of Obama's thirty-three thousand citizens have signed up for membership.

The other day, Fujihara had an appointment to present to the city's new mayor, Kouji Matsuzaki, a trumpet-sleeved *happi* coat with "I ♥ Obama" printed on the back. He arrived at City Hall wearing an Obama-for-Obama-made tie, along with a campaign-issued Obama '08 pin. The previous mayor, he said, had approved of the group's efforts, and had even sent the Senator a lacquer *daruma* doll—a limbless, egg-shaped figure considered by Japanese politicians to be a good-luck charm—inscribed with the message "You Should Win."

At the designated hour, Fujihara made a neat stack of the *happi* coat, an Obama tie, and a copy of "Obama Is Beautiful World" and headed for the Mayor's conference room. He bowed to the Mayor—who bowed back, and graciously received the swag. Then they sat down to talk odds. "The Bush Administration is admitting to the Wall Street scandal," Fujihara said. "Mr. Obama is getting a tailwind from this financial mayhem." If Obama wins, Fujihara said, he hopes to go to Washington for the Inauguration.

And what of Fukui City? There, in a field of flowering buckwheat, sits Masunaga Optical Manufacturing, maker of the Palin frames. Satoru Masunaga, the company's C.E.O. (his grandfather started the firm, in 1905), wears specs from the company's high-end line. Palin's frames—MP-704, color No. 34, about three hundred and fifty dollars before lenses—he considers "middle class." Personally, he hopes Palin will become Vice-President. "Before this happened with Palin, we sold five hundred pieces of this style a month in the U.S.," he said. "Now we cannot count. Since the beginning of September, there have been more than ten thousand orders."

Palin is said to own seven pairs of glasses, but Masunaga is confident that she'll stick with the 704s. "Our eyeglasses have given a boost to her image and her

I will leave the car
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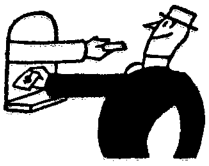
performance, so I think she will wear them," he said. "If you see her in her old eyeglasses, she looks like an O.K. hockey mom. But when she wears our glasses she looks like a real politician. She looks intelligent." (He mentioned that Henry Paulson, the Treasury Secretary, also wears Masunaga frames.)

Kazuo Kawasaki, the designer of a fully artificial heart, nuclear generators for the home, and Palin's eyeglasses, is from Fukui City. He is a self-proclaimed conservative, but he refuses to take sides. "I'm hoping that through my glasses she will grasp the world correctly," he said. "I heard that, during her time as First Lady, Hillary Clinton also wore my glasses, when she was at home. Of course, Mrs. Palin is a very beautiful woman, and if she became Vice-President I would love to become her fashion stylist." If anybody cares, the model that Clinton is said to have worn is MP-631, but she wouldn't confirm it.

—*Dana Goodyear*

THE BOARDS
NEW KID



Lincoln Center Theatre has never had a rapper on its boards, but this month, as part of a new program to encourage emerging playwrights, it is taking under its wing—and stashing twenty blocks south, at its new two-hundred-seat Duke—the one-man hip-hop show "Clay." Matt Sax, the show's twenty-four-year-old author-composer-performer, took a breather one afternoon recently, in the rehearsal studio under the Vivian Beaumont stage. Sax is just under six feet tall, with close-cropped dark hair and a tiny gold sapphire-studded hoop in his left earlobe. "My eyes are extra big, like Buster Keaton's, one of my comic heroes," he volunteered, against the faint strains of "There Is Nothin' Like a Dame" coming from the sold-out "South Pacific" matinée (1,041 seats) overhead.

"I was just fitted for my costume, all black," he said, fingering his hoodie. He lifted his feet, exposing rainbow colors on the soles of his sneakers. "But this is for my rap. The show is billed as a one-man hip-hop musical, but it's a drama with hip-hop music. It's about a young man trying to make something of himself."

Bernard Gersten, "Clay" 's executive producer, wandered in. He said that he had just left a production meeting for "Dividing the Estate," by Horton Foote. "Our oldest playwright!" he said. "His is the one-hundred-and-twenty-second show I've executive-produced since we started here, in 1985. You're our youngest playwright, bringing in No. 123."

Sax smiled. "I named the show 'Clay' to give a sense of the molding of all possibilities in my life," he said. "The first rapper I heard, when I was thirteen, was Biggie, probably the best rapper ever. Angry. Like me. I had teen-age angst. I went right out and bought Biggie's record 'Ready to Die.' At the end of it, you hear him kill himself. Very dramatic.

"I write very fast," Sax continued. "Want to hear me create a rap for you?" He hunched his shoulders, still seated, and chanted, to the usual 4/4 beat:

As I grow up
I question what it
Means to be a man
'Cause I'm wrestling with messages
And doing what I can
And may I say
Shit has gotten out of hand—
And I'm stopping when I can
Take a breath to understand
Damn—role models quicken into sand
And I'm looking at the brand of man society demands.

Gersten looked impressed.

"I suppose it's about me," Sax said. "Rap isn't all drugs and shooting people. I was born in Manhattan, moved to Mamaroneck when I was eight. My parents still live in the same house. My father is a wealth manager. My grandfather is a psychoanalyst; his wife is a food critic. When I was sixteen, they took me to London and to the Royal Shakespeare to see 'Henry IV,' Parts One and Two, in one day—eight hours."

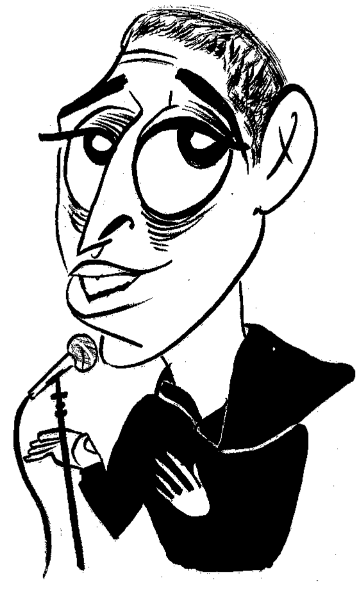
Gersten laughed. "My father was a sewing-machine operator. I couldn't even spell 'Mamaroneck' till I was thirty," he said. "I was born in Newark, and I was perfectly happy to be there."

"I started writing the play when I was at Northwestern," Sax said. "I went there to follow a girl. In boring classes I'd take out a notebook and start writing. I was angry when I tried out for Treplyov, in 'The Seagull,' and didn't get cast."

"I had that kind of anger," Gersten said. "In sixth grade, I wanted to be the Mad Hatter in the 'Tea Party' play. But Miss Cullimore gave the part to Nick Andreas, the barber's son."

Sax said, "When I didn't get cast as Treplyov, I had this realization: Nobody is going to give me anything. I'm going to have to create it for myself."

"I did that," Gersten said. "Nick got appendicitis, so I rushed to Miss Cullimore and told her, and she gave me the part, after all."



Matt Sax

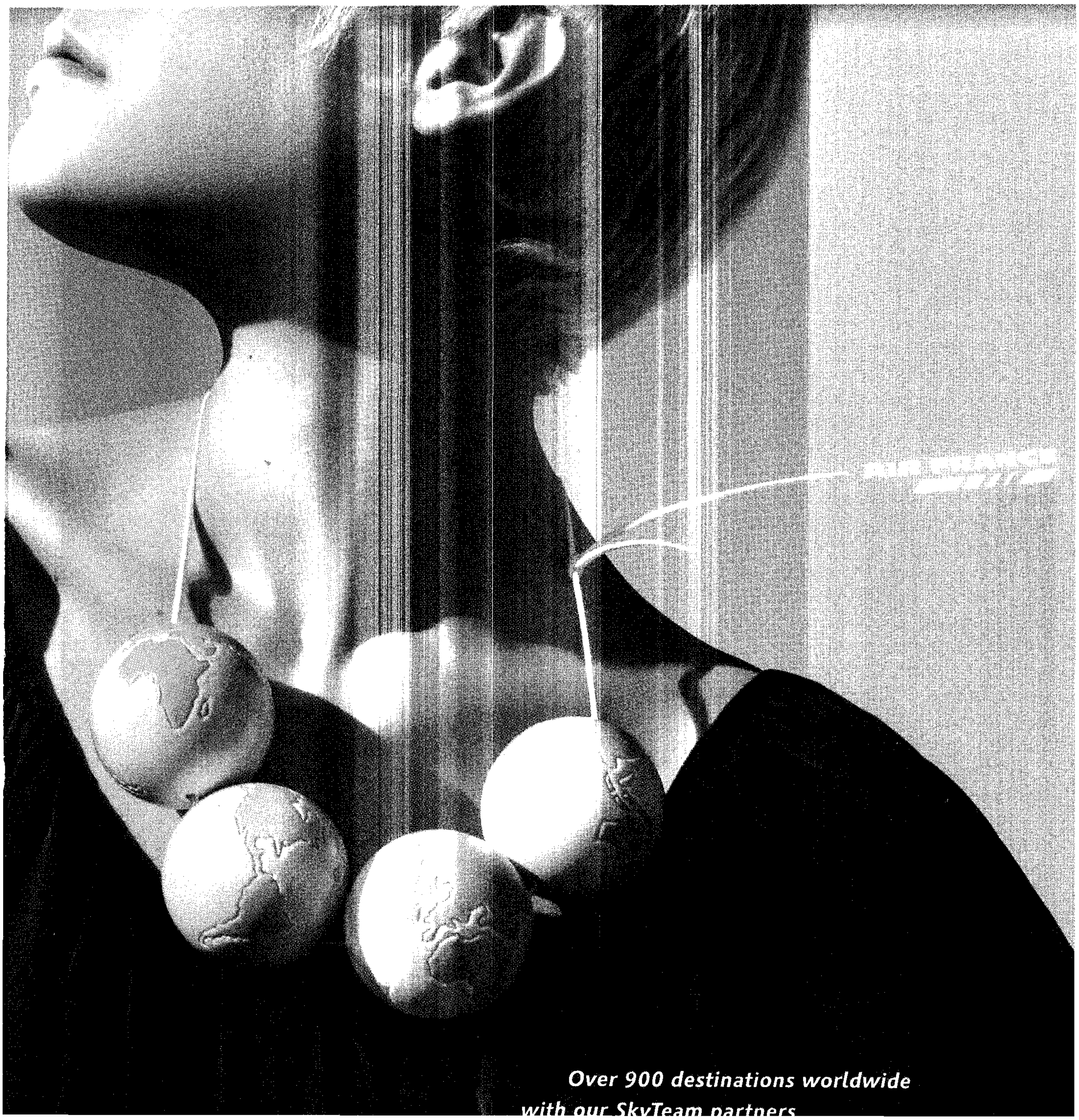
"I was still very angry when I was twenty," Sax said. "So I took 'Clay' to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival."

"I went to Rutgers for two years, until World War II, when I enlisted in the Army," Gersten said. "They sent me to Hawaii and had me doing shows like 'Five Guys in a Jeep' and 'Hamlet' for the troops."

"I modelled one of my characters on Falstaff," Sax said. "What I do is still somewhat bizarre to my parents, but my grandfather, who had been disapproving, because he had treated child actors, is now very supportive. I have a business sensibility, coming from that family. Now I'm living in a really cool space in South Williamsburg, with an actor and a dancer. We have a big stage, with a piano and drums and all my keyboards. The angst is gone."

"Angst?" Gersten said. "My parents were just relieved to see me making a living. They loved it when I brought home the stars."

—*Lillian Ross*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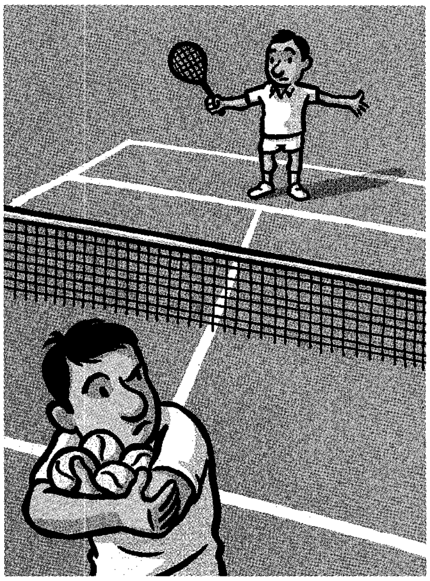
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
THE TRUST CRUNCH

In December, 1912, J. P. Morgan testified before Congress in the so-called Money Trust hearings. Asked to explain how he decided whether to make a loan or investment, he replied, "The first thing is character." His questioner skeptically suggested that factors like collateral might be more important, but Morgan replied, "A man I do not trust could not get money from me on all the bonds in Christendom." Morgan's point was simple but essential: systems of credit depend on trust. When trust is present, money flows smoothly from lenders to borrowers, allowing new enterprises to start, existing ones to expand, and daily business to move along without a hitch. When it's absent, we find ourselves in a world where lenders hoard capital, borrowers are left empty-handed, and the economy's gears grind to a halt—a world, in other words, like the one we're now living in.

A few years ago, banks and other lenders seemed indifferent to risk, as they doled out loans to people with dubious incomes and poor credit records. Today, they are positively paranoid, distrusting even the best borrowers and forcing companies to pay far more interest on money borrowed. The interest rate on the most highly rated two-year corporate bonds has risen by fifty per cent in the past month, even as the interest rate on government bonds has fallen.

Shocking as the current stock-market drops have been, the freezing up of the flow of credit is far more damaging to the health of the U.S. economy. So, during the past few weeks, the Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve have been desperately trying to fight that freeze. Scarcely a day goes by without some dramatic new initiative, even as market chaos makes each new idea soon seem like ancient history. (It's been just over a week since the Treasury's plan to buy seven hundred billion dollars' worth of "toxic assets" became law, but already it feels like a year.) Last week, in a potentially crucial move, the Fed announced that it would start buying billions of dollars in commercial paper—which means that it will be issuing short-term unsecured loans to corporations. The Fed has historically been the lender of last resort to banks. Now it's becoming the lender of last resort to everyone.

Commercial paper is the name for short-term promissory notes that companies sell to raise money for daily operations, to meet payroll, and to bridge the gap between when they spend and when they get paid, while keeping their own cash in higher-yield investments. Commercial paper is not a new innovation—Goldman Sachs actually started as a commercial-paper firm, in the late nineteenth century—but it has become essential in day-to-day business in the U.S. Since 1980, annual commercial-paper issuance has gone from $124 billion to $1.6 trillion. Most of these loans are unsecured—companies don't put up collateral but simply promise to pay the loans back out of cash flow—so only well-established, financially solid companies can tap the commercial-paper market.



Because commercial-paper loans are short-term and are made only to companies with sterling credit ratings, they've always been assumed to be practically riskless, and lenders (most notably money-market funds) have been willing to lend at low interest rates. But the past year has called into question the very idea of a low-risk loan. Lehman Brothers, after all, still had an A2 credit rating when it went under, taking down with it billions in commercial paper. Since its failure, lenders have adopted a gimlet-eyed approach to everyone, making it hard for key companies to perform basic transactions, and thereby exacerbating the market panic. A company like A. T. &T. is hardly likely to go bankrupt in the foreseeable future, but, after Lehman's collapse, lenders were so skittish that A. T. &T. couldn't get commercial-paper loans that lasted longer than overnight.

The fear that has overpowered lenders is not just about the current market chaos. It also reflects their lack of faith in the models and systems that they rely on to evaluate risk. For Morgan, that process of evaluation was all about relationships. In the modern financial system, by contrast, risk evaluation involves two things: impersonality and outsourcing. Personal judgments about the reliability of a borrower—the sort of judgment that Morgan, or a small-town banker, would make before issuing a loan—have been replaced by mathematical models. And lenders have delegated much of the responsibility for evaluating borrowers to other players, such as credit-rating agencies. In many cases, an AA rating was all a company needed to get a loan.

There's no doubt that this system has had huge benefits. It has made it easier for money to connect lenders and borrowers. It has removed the kinds of personal bias that kept capital in the hands of people whom men like J. P. Morgan approved of. And it has vastly expanded the amount of lending as well. But all those benefits have come at an exorbitant price. The problem with an impersonal system is that when the models fail, and when companies' ratings become suspect, everything is called into question. Lenders can't fall back on their own judgments of a specific company or individual, because such judgments aren't part of their typical decision-making process. Instead, they've adopted a deep-seated distrust of all borrowers, even financially secure ones. If the Fed is now taking corporate I.O.U.s, it's because everyone else is acting according to that old motto: In God we trust—all others pay cash.

—*James Surowiecki*

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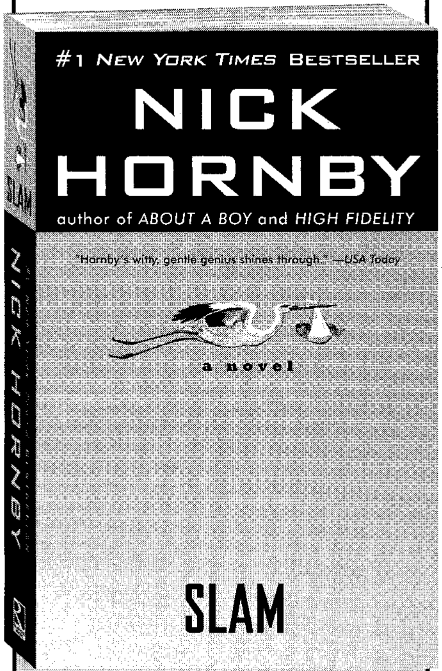
NICK HORNBY'S "WITTY, GENTLE GENIUS SHINES THROUGH."—*USA Today*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ANNALS OF CULTURE

LATE BLOOMERS

Why do we equate genius with precocity?

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

Ben Fountain was an associate in the real-estate practice at the Dallas offices of Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld, just a few years out of law school, when he decided he wanted to write fiction. The only thing Fountain had ever published was a law-review article. His literary training consisted of a handful of creative-writing classes in college. He had tried to write when he came home at night from work, but usually he was too tired to do much. He decided to quit his job.

"I was tremendously apprehensive," Fountain recalls. "I felt like I'd stepped off a cliff and I didn't know if the parachute was going to open. Nobody wants to waste their life, and I was doing well at the practice of law. I could have had a good career. And my parents were very proud of me—my dad was so proud of me. . . . It was crazy."

He began his new life on a February morning—a Monday. He sat down at his kitchen table at 7:30 A.M. He made a plan. Every day, he would write until lunchtime. Then he would lie down on the floor for twenty minutes to rest his mind. Then he would return to work for a few more hours. He was a lawyer. He had discipline. "I figured out very early on that if I didn't get my writing done I felt terrible. So I always got my writing done. I treated it like a job. I did not procrastinate." His first story was about a stockbroker who uses inside information and crosses a moral line. It was sixty pages long and took him three months to write. When he finished that story, he went back to work and wrote another—and then another.

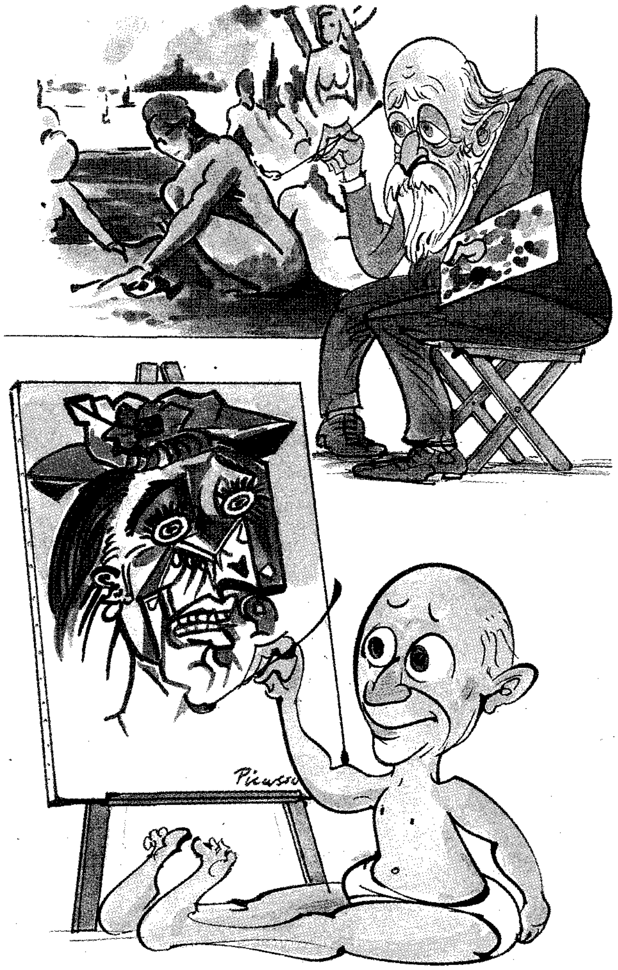
In his first year, Fountain sold two stories. He gained confidence. He wrote a novel. He decided it wasn't very good, and he ended up putting it in a drawer. Then came what he describes as his dark period, when he adjusted his expectations and started again. He got a short story published in *Harper's*. A New York literary agent saw it and signed him up. He put together a collection of short stories titled "Brief Encounters with Che Guevara," and Ecco, a HarperCollins imprint, published it. The reviews were sensational. The *Times Book Review* called it "heartbreaking." It won the Hemingway Foundation/PEN award. It was named a No. 1 Book Sense Pick. It made major regional best-seller lists, was named one of the best books of the year by the San Francisco *Chronicle*, the Chicago *Tribune*, and *Kirkus Reviews*, and drew comparisons to Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, Robert Stone, and John le Carré.

Ben Fountain's rise sounds like a familiar story: the young man from the provinces suddenly takes the literary world by storm. But Ben Fountain's success was far from sudden. He quit his job at Akin, Gump in 1988. For every story he published in those early years, he had at least thirty rejections. The novel that he put away in a drawer took him four years. The dark period lasted for the entire second half of the nineteen-nineties. His breakthrough with "Brief Encounters" came in 2006, eighteen years after he first sat down to write at his kitchen table. The "young" writer from the provinces took the literary world by storm at the age of forty-eight.

Genius, in the popular conception, is inextricably tied up with precocity—doing something truly creative, we're inclined to think, requires the freshness and exuberance and energy of youth. Orson Welles made his masterpiece, "Citizen Kane," at twenty-five. Herman Melville wrote a book a year through his late twenties, culminating, at age thirty-two, with "Moby-Dick." Mozart wrote his breakthrough Piano Concerto No. 9 in E-Flat-Major at the age of twenty-one. In some creative forms, like lyric poetry, the importance of precocity has hardened into an iron law. How old was T. S. Eliot when he wrote “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (“I grow old . . . I grow old”)? Twenty-three. “Poets peak young,” the creativity researcher James Kaufman maintains. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, the author of “Flow,” agrees: “The most creative lyric verse is believed to be that written by the young.” According to the Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner, a leading authority on creativity, “Lyric poetry is a domain where talent is discovered early, burns brightly, and then peters out at an early age.”

A few years ago, an economist at the University of Chicago named David Galenson decided to find out whether this assumption about creativity was true. He looked through forty-seven major poetry anthologies published since 1980 and counted the poems that appear most frequently. Some people, of course, would quarrel with the notion that literary merit can be quantified. But Galenson simply wanted to poll a broad cross-section of literary scholars about which poems they felt were the most important in the American canon. The top eleven are, in order, T. S. Eliot’s “Prufrock,” Robert Lowell’s “Skunk Hour,” Robert Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” William Carlos Williams’s “Red Wheelbarrow,” Elizabeth Bishop’s “The Fish,” Ezra Pound’s “The River Merchant’s Wife,” Sylvia Plath’s “Daddy,” Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro,” Frost’s “Mending Wall,” Wallace Stevens’s “The Snow Man,” and Williams’s “The Dance.” Those eleven were composed at the ages of twenty-three, forty-one, forty-eight, forty, twenty-nine, thirty, thirty, twenty-eight, thirty-eight, forty-two, and fifty-nine, respectively. There is no evidence, Galenson concluded, for the notion that lyric poetry is a young person’s game. Some poets do their best work at the beginning of their careers. Others do their best work decades later. Forty-two per cent of Frost’s anthologized poems were written after the age of fifty. For Williams, it’s forty-four per cent. For Stevens, it’s forty-nine per cent.

The same was true of film, Galenson points out in his study “Old Masters and Young Geniuses: The Two Life Cycles of Artistic Creativity.” Yes, there was Orson Welles, peaking as a director at twenty-five. But then there was Alfred Hitchcock, who made “Dial M for Murder,” “Rear Window,” “To Catch a Thief,” “The Trouble with Harry,” “Vertigo,” “North by Northwest,” and “Psycho”—one of the greatest runs by a director in history—between his fifty-fourth and sixty-first birthdays. Mark Twain published “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” at forty-nine. Daniel Defoe wrote “Robinson Crusoe” at fifty-eight.



Picasso’s greatest works came early; Cézanne’s came late.

GERALD SCARFE

The examples that Galenson could not get out of his head, however, were Picasso and Cézanne. He was an art lover, and he knew their stories well. Picasso was the incandescent prodigy. His career as a serious artist began with a masterpiece, “Evocation: The Burial of Casagemas,” produced at age twenty. In short order, he painted many of the greatest works of his career—including “Les Demoiselles d’Avignon,” at the age of twenty-six. Picasso fit our usual ideas about genius perfectly.

Cézanne didn’t. If you go to the Cézanne room at the Musée d’Orsay, in Paris—the finest collection of Cézannes in the world—the array of masterpieces you’ll find along the back wall were all painted at the end of his career. Galenson did a simple economic analysis, tabulating the prices paid at auction for paintings by Picasso and Cézanne with the ages at which they created those works. A painting done by Picasso in his mid-twenties was worth, he found, an average of four times as much as a painting done in his sixties. For Cézanne, the opposite was true. The paintings he created in his mid-sixties were valued fifteen times as highly as the paintings he created as a young man. The freshness, exuberance, and energy of youth did little for Cézanne. He was a late bloomer—and for some reason in our accounting of genius and creativity we have forgotten to make sense of the Cézannes of the world.

The first day that Ben Fountain sat down to write at his kitchen table went well. He knew how the story about the stockbroker was supposed to start. But the second day, he says, he “completely freaked out.” He didn’t know how to describe things. He felt as if he were back in first grade. He didn’t have a fully formed vision, waiting to be emptied onto the page. “I had to create a mental image of a building, a room, a façade, haircut, clothes—just really basic things,” he says. “I realized I didn’t have the facility to put those into words. I started going out and buying visual dictionaries, architectural dictionaries, and going to school on those.”

He began to collect articles about things he was interested in, and before long he realized that he had developed a fascination with Haiti. "The Haiti file just kept getting bigger and bigger," Fountain says. "And I thought, O.K., here's my novel. For a month or two I said I really don't need to go there, I can imagine everything. But after a couple of months I thought, Yeah, you've got to go there, and so I went, in April or May of '91."

He spoke little French, let alone Haitian Creole. He had never been abroad. Nor did he know anyone in Haiti. "I got to the hotel, walked up the stairs, and there was this guy standing at the top of the stairs," Fountain recalls. "He said, 'My name is Pierre. You need a guide.' I said, 'You're sure as hell right, I do.' He was a very genuine person, and he realized pretty quickly I didn't want to go see the girls, I didn't want drugs, I didn't want any of that other stuff," Fountain went on. "And then it was, *boom*, 'I can take you there. I can take you to this person.' "

Fountain was riveted by Haiti. "It's like a laboratory, almost," he says. "Everything that's gone on in the last five hundred years—colonialism, race, power, politics, ecological disasters—it's all there in very concentrated form. And also I just felt, viscerally, pretty comfortable there." He made more trips to Haiti, sometimes for a week, sometimes for two weeks. He made friends. He invited them to visit him in Dallas. ("You haven't lived until you've had Haitians stay in your house," Fountain says.) "I mean, I was involved. I couldn't just walk away. There's this very nonrational, nonlinear part of the whole process. I had a pretty specific time era that I was writing about, and certain things that I needed to know. But there were other things I didn't really need to know. I met a fellow who was with Save the Children, and he was on the Central Plateau, which takes about twelve hours to get to on a bus, and I had no reason to go there. But I went up there. Suffered on that bus, and ate dust. It was a hard trip, but it was a glorious trip. It had nothing to do with the book, but it wasn't wasted knowledge."

In "Brief Encounters with Che Guevara," four of the stories are about Haiti, and they are the strongest in the collection. They feel like Haiti; they feel as if they've been written from the inside looking out, not the outside looking in. "After the novel was done, I don't know, I just felt like there was more for me, and I could keep going, keep going deeper there," Fountain recalls. "Always there's something—always something—here for me. How many times have I been? At least thirty times."

Prodigies like Picasso, Galenson argues, rarely engage in that kind of open-ended exploration. They tend to be "conceptual," Galenson says, in the sense that they start with a clear idea of where they want to go, and then they execute it. "I can hardly understand the importance given to the word 'research,' " Picasso once said in an interview with the artist Marius de Zayas. "In my opinion, to search means nothing in painting. To find is the thing." He continued, "The several manners I have used in my art must not be considered as an evolution or as steps toward an unknown ideal of painting. . . . I have never made trials or experiments."

But late bloomers, Galenson says, tend to work the other way around. Their approach is experimental. "Their goals are imprecise, so their procedure is tentative and incremental," Galenson writes in "Old Masters and Young Geniuses," and he goes on:

> The imprecision of their goals means that these artists rarely feel they have succeeded, and their careers are consequently often dominated by the pursuit of a single objective. These artists repeat themselves, painting the same subject many times, and gradually changing its treatment in an experimental process of trial and error. Each work leads to the next, and none is generally privileged over others, so experimental painters rarely make specific preparatory sketches or plans for a painting. They consider the production of a painting as a process of searching, in which they aim to discover the image in the course of making it; they typically believe that learning is a more important goal than making finished paintings. Experimental artists build their skills gradually over the course of their careers, improving their work slowly over long periods. These artists are perfectionists and are typically plagued by frustration at their inability to achieve their goal.

Where Picasso wanted to find, not search, Cézanne said the opposite: "I seek in painting."

An experimental innovator *would* go back to Haiti thirty times. That's how that kind of mind figures out what it wants to do. When Cézanne was painting a portrait of the critic Gustave Geffroy, he made him endure eighty sittings, over three months, before announcing the project a failure. (The result is one of that string of masterpieces in the Musée d'Orsay.) When Cézanne painted his dealer, Ambrose Vollard, he made Vollard arrive at eight in the morning and sit on a rickety platform until eleven-thirty, without a break, on a hundred and fifty occasions—before abandoning the portrait. He would paint a scene, then repaint it, then paint it again. He was notorious for slashing his canvases to pieces in fits of frustration.

Mark Twain was the same way. Galenson quotes the literary critic Franklin Rogers on Twain's trial-and-error method: "His routine procedure seems to have been to start a novel with some structural plan which ordinarily soon proved defective, whereupon he would cast about for a new plot which would overcome the difficulty, rewrite what he had already written, and then push on until some new defect forced him to repeat the process once again." Twain fiddled and despaired and revised and gave up on "Huckleberry Finn" so many times that the book took him nearly a decade to complete. The Cézannes of the world bloom late not as a result of some defect in character, or distraction, or lack of ambition, but because the kind of creativity that proceeds through trial and error necessarily takes a long time to come to fruition.

One of the best stories in "Brief Encounters" is called "Near-Extinct Birds of the Central Cordillera." It's about an ornithologist taken hostage by the FARC guerrillas of Colombia. Like so much of Fountain's work, it reads with an easy grace. But there was nothing easy or graceful about its creation. "I struggled with that story," Fountain says. "I always try to do too much. I mean, I probably wrote five hundred pages of it in various incarnations." Fountain is at work right now on a novel. It was supposed to come out this year. It's late.

Galenson's idea that creativity can be divided into these types—conceptual and experimental—has a number of important implications. For example, we sometimes think of late bloomers as late starters. They don't realize they're good at something until they're fifty, so of course they achieve late in life. But that's not quite right.

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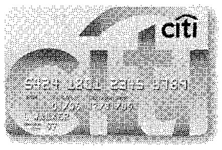

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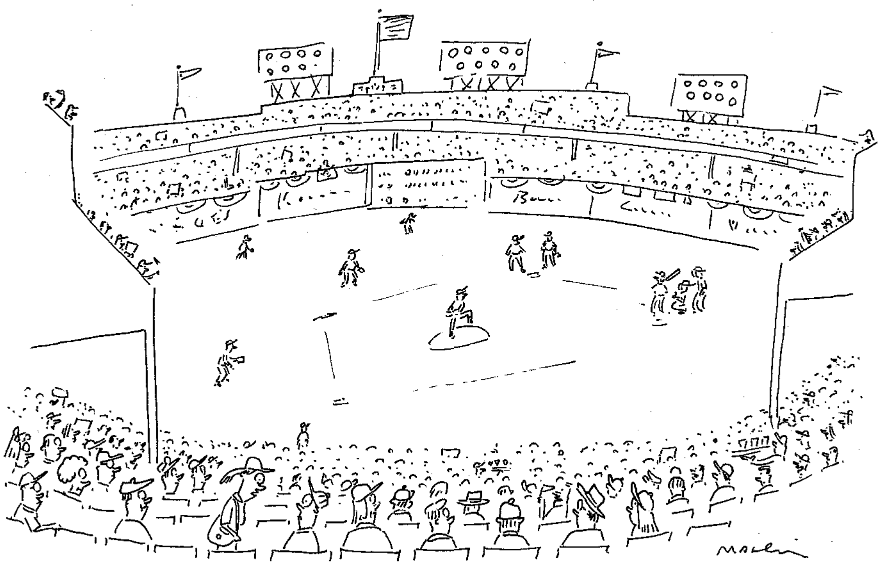

"I've found someone else, Ned—someone with better seats."

• •

Cézanne was painting almost as early as Picasso was. We also sometimes think of them as artists who are *discovered* late; the world is just slow to appreciate their gifts. In both cases, the assumption is that the prodigy and the late bloomer are fundamentally the same, and that late blooming is simply genius under conditions of market failure. What Galenson's argument suggests is something else—that late bloomers bloom late because they simply aren't much good until late in their careers.

"All these qualities of his inner vision were continually hampered and obstructed by Cézanne's incapacity to give sufficient verisimilitude to the personae of his drama," the great English art critic Roger Fry wrote of the early Cézanne. "With all his rare endowments, he happened to lack the comparatively common gift of illustration, the gift that any draughtsman for the illustrated papers learns in a school of commercial art; whereas, to realize such visions as Cézanne's required this gift in high degree." In other words, the young Cézanne couldn't draw. Of "The Banquet," which Cézanne painted at thirty-one, Fry writes, "It is no use to deny that Cézanne has made a very poor job of it." Fry goes on, "More happily endowed and more integral personalities have been able to express themselves harmoniously from the very first. But such rich, complex, and conflicting natures as Cézanne's require a long period of fermentation." Cézanne was trying something so elusive that he couldn't master it until he'd spent decades practicing.

This is the vexing lesson of Fountain's long attempt to get noticed by the literary world. On the road to great achievement, the late bloomer will resemble a failure: while the late bloomer is revising and despairing and changing course and slashing canvases to ribbons after months or years, what he or she produces will look like the kind of thing produced by the artist who will never bloom at all. Prodigies are easy. They advertise their genius from the get-go. Late bloomers are hard. They require forbearance and blind faith. (Let's just be thankful that Cézanne didn't have a guidance counsellor in high school who looked at his primitive sketches and told him to try accounting.) Whenever we find a late bloomer, we can't but wonder how many others like him or her we have thwarted because we prematurely judged their talents. But we also have to acccept that there's nothing we can do about it. How can we ever know which of the failures will end up blooming?

Not long after meeting Ben Fountain, I went to see the novelist Jonathan Safran Foer, the author of the 2002 best-seller "Everything Is Illuminated." Fountain is a graying man, slight and modest, who looks, in the words of a friend of his, like a "golf pro from Augusta, Georgia." Foer is in his early thirties and looks barely old enough to drink. Fountain has a softness to him, as if years of struggle have worn away whatever sharp edges he once had. Foer gives the impression that if you touched him while he was in full conversational flight you would get an electric shock.

"I came to writing really by the back door," Foer said. "My wife is a writer, and she grew up keeping journals—you know, parents said, 'Lights out, time for bed,' and she had a little flashlight under the covers, reading books. I don't think I *read* a book until much later than other people. I just wasn't interested in it."

Foer went to Princeton and took a creative-writing class in his freshman year with Joyce Carol Oates. It was, he explains, "sort of on a whim, maybe out of a sense that I should have a diverse course load." He'd never written a story before. "I didn't really think anything of it, to be honest, but halfway through the semester I arrived to class early one day, and she said, 'Oh, I'm glad I have this chance to talk to you. I'm a fan of your writing.' And it was a *real* revelation for me."

Oates told him that he had the most important of writerly qualities, which was energy. He had been writing fifteen pages a week for that class, an entire story for each seminar. "Why does a dam with a crack in it leak so much?" he said, with a laugh. "There was just something in me, there was like a pressure."

As a sophomore, he took another creative-writing class. During the following summer, he went to Europe. He wanted to find the village in Ukraine where his grandfather had come from. After the trip, he went to Prague. There he read Kafka, as any literary undergraduate would, and sat down at his computer.

"I was just writing," he said. "I didn't know that I was writing until it was happening. I didn't go with the intention of writing a book. I wrote three hundred pages in ten weeks. I *really* wrote. I'd never done it like that."

It was a novel about a boy named Jonathan Safran Foer who visits the village in Ukraine where his grandfather had come from. Those three hundred pages were the first draft of "Everything Is Illuminated"—the exquisite and extraordinary novel that established Foer as one of the most distinctive literary voices of his generation. He was nineteen years old.

Foer began to talk about the other way of writing books, where you painstakingly honed your craft, over years and years. "I couldn't do that," he said. He seemed puzzled by it. It was clear that he had no understanding of how being an experimental innovator would work. "I mean, imagine if the craft you're trying to learn is to be an original. How could you learn the craft of being an original?"

He began to describe his visit to Ukraine. "I went to the shtetl where my family came from. It's called Trachimbrod, the name I use in the book. It's a real place. But you know what's funny? It's the single piece of research that made its way into the book." He wrote the first sentence, and he was proud of it, and then he went back and forth in his mind about where to go next. "I spent the first week just having this debate with myself about what to do with this first sentence. And once I made the decision, I felt liberated to just create—and it was very explosive after that."

If you read "Everything Is Illuminated," you end up with the same feeling you get when you read "Brief Encounters with Che Guevara"—the sense of transport you experience when a work of literature draws you into its own world. Both are works of art. It's just that, as artists, Fountain and Foer could not be less alike. Fountain went to Haiti thirty times. Foer went to Trachimbrod just once. "I mean, it was nothing," Foer said. "I had absolutely no experience there at all. It was just a springboard for my book. It was like an empty swimming pool that had to be filled up." Total time spent getting inspiration for his novel: three days.

Ben Fountain did not make the decision to quit the law and become a writer all by himself. He is married and has a family. He met his wife, Sharon, when they were both in law school at Duke. When he was doing real-estate work at Akin, Gump, she was on the partner track in the tax practice at Thompson & Knight. The two actually worked in the same building in downtown Dallas. They got married in 1985, and had a son in April of 1987. Sharie, as Fountain calls her, took four months of maternity leave before returning to work. She made partner by the end of that year.

"We had our son in a day care downtown," she recalls. "We would drive in together, one of us would take him to day care, the other one would go to work. One of us would pick him up, and then, somewhere around eight o'clock at night, we would have him bathed, in bed, and then we hadn't even eaten yet, and we'd be looking at each other, going, 'This is just the beginning.' " She made a face. "That went on for maybe a month or two, and Ben's like, 'I don't know how people do this.' We both agreed that continuing at that pace was probably going to make us all miserable. Ben said to me, 'Do you want to stay home?' Well, I was pretty happy in my job, and he wasn't, so as far as I was concerned it didn't make any sense for me to stay home. And I didn't have anything besides practicing law that I really wanted to do, and he did. So I said, 'Look, can we do this in a way that we can still have some day care and so you can write?' And so we did that."

Ben could start writing at seven-thirty in the morning because Sharie took their son to day care. He stopped working in the afternoon because that was when he had to pick him up, and then he did the shopping and the household chores. In 1989, they had a second child, a daughter. Fountain was a full-fledged North Dallas stay-at-home dad.

"When Ben first did this, we talked about the fact that it might not work, and we talked about, generally, 'When will we know that it really isn't working?' and I'd say, 'Well, give it ten years,' " Sharie recalled. To her, ten years didn't seem unreasonable. "It takes a while to decide whether you like something or not," she says. And when ten years became twelve and then fourteen and then sixteen, and the kids were off in high school, she stood by him, because, even during that long stretch when Ben had nothing published at all, she was confident that he was getting better. She was fine with the trips to Haiti, too. "I can't imagine writing a novel about a place you haven't at least tried to visit," she says. She even went with him once, and on the way into town from the airport there were people burning tires in the middle of the road.

"I was making pretty decent money, and we didn't need two incomes," Sharie went on. She has a calm, unflappable quality about her. "I mean, it would have been nice, but we could live on one."

Sharie was Ben's wife. But she was also—to borrow a term from long ago—his patron. That word has a condescending edge to it today, because we think it far more appropriate for artists (and everyone else for that matter) to be supported by the marketplace. But the marketplace works only for people like Jonathan Safran Foer, whose art emerges, fully realized, at the beginning of their career, or Picasso, whose talent was so blindingly obvious that an art dealer offered him a hundred-and-fifty-franc-a-month stipend the minute he got to Paris, at age twenty. If you are the type of creative mind that starts without a plan, and has to experiment and learn by doing, you need someone to see you through the long and difficult time it takes for your art to reach its true level.

This is what is so instructive about any biography of Cézanne. Accounts of his life start out being about Cézanne, and then quickly turn into the story of Cézanne's circle. First and foremost is always his best friend from childhood, the writer Émile Zola, who convinces the awkward misfit from the provinces to come to Paris, and who serves as his guardian and protector and coach through the long, lean years.

Here is Zola, already in Paris, in a letter to the young Cézanne back in Provence. Note the tone, more paternal than fraternal:

> You ask me an odd question. Of course one can work here, as anywhere else, if one has the will. Paris offers, further, an advantage you can't find elsewhere: the museums in which you can study the old masters from 11 to 4. This is how you must divide your time. From 6 to 11 you go to a studio to paint from a live model; you have lunch, then from 12 to 4 you copy, in the Louvre or the Luxembourg, whatever masterpiece you like. That will make up nine hours of work. I think that ought to be enough.

Zola goes on, detailing exactly how Cézanne could manage financially on a monthly stipend of a hundred and twenty-five francs:

> I'll reckon out for you what you should spend. A room at 20 francs a month; lunch at

> 18 sous and dinner at 22, which makes two francs a day, or 60 francs a month. . . . Then you have the studio to pay for: the Atelier Suisse, one of the least expensive, charges, I think, 10 francs. Add 10 francs for canvas, brushes, colors; that makes 100. So you'll have 25 francs left for laundry, light, the thousand little needs that turn up.

Camille Pissarro was the next critical figure in Cézanne's life. It was Pissarro who took Cézanne under his wing and taught him how to be a painter. For years, there would be periods in which they went off into the country and worked side by side.

Then there was Ambrose Vollard, the sponsor of Cézanne's first one-man show, at the age of fifty-six. At the urging of Pissarro, Renoir, Degas, and Monet, Vollard hunted down Cézanne in Aix. He spotted a still-life in a tree, where it had been flung by Cézanne in disgust. He poked around the town, putting the word out that he was in the market for Cézanne's canvases. In "Lost Earth: A Life of Cézanne," the biographer Philip Callow writes about what happened next:

> Before long someone appeared at his hotel with an object wrapped in a cloth. He sold the picture for 150 francs, which inspired him to trot back to his house with the dealer to inspect several more magnificent Cézannes. Vollard paid a thousand francs for the job lot, then on the way out was nearly hit on the head by a canvas that had been overlooked, dropped out the window by the man's wife. All the pictures had been gathering dust, half buried in a pile of junk in the attic.

All this came before Vollard agreed to sit a hundred and fifty times, from eight in the morning to eleven-thirty, without a break, for a picture that Cézanne disgustedly abandoned. Once, Vollard recounted in his memoir, he fell asleep, and toppled off the makeshift platform. Cézanne berated him, incensed: "Does an apple move?" This is called friendship.

Finally, there was Cézanne's father, the banker Louis-Auguste. From the time Cézanne first left Aix, at the age of twenty-two, Louis-Auguste paid his bills, even when Cézanne gave every indication of being nothing more than a failed dilettante. But for Zola, Cézanne would have remained an unhappy banker's son in Provence; but for Pissarro, he would never have learned how to paint; but for Vollard (at the urging of Pissarro, Renoir, Degas, and Monet), his canvases would have rotted away in some attic; and, but for his father, Cézanne's long apprenticeship would have been a financial impossibility. That is an extraordinary list of patrons. The first three—Zola, Pissarro, and Vollard—would have been famous even if Cézanne never existed, and the fourth was an unusually gifted entrepreneur who left Cézanne four hundred thousand francs when he died. Cézanne didn't just have help. He had a dream team in his corner.

This is the final lesson of the late bloomer: his or her success is highly contingent on the efforts of others. In biographies of Cézanne, Louis-Auguste invariably comes across as a kind of grumpy philistine, who didn't appreciate his son's genius. But Louis-Auguste didn't have to support Cézanne all those years. He would have been within his rights to make his son get a real job, just as Sharie might well have said no to her husband's repeated trips to the chaos of Haiti. She could have argued that she had some right to the life style of her profession and status—that she deserved to drive a BMW, which is what power couples in North Dallas drive, instead of a Honda Accord, which is what she settled for.

But she believed in her husband's art, or perhaps, more simply, she believed in her husband, the same way Zola and Pissarro and Vollard and—in his own, querulous way—Louis-Auguste must have believed in Cézanne. Late bloomers' stories are invariably love stories, and this may be why we have such difficulty with them. We'd like to think that mundane matters like loyalty, steadfastness, and the willingness to keep writing checks to support what looks like failure have nothing to do with something as rarefied as genius. But sometimes genius is anything but rarefied; sometimes it's just the thing that emerges after twenty years of working at your kitchen table.

"Sharie never once brought up money, not once—never," Fountain said. She was sitting next to him, and he looked at her in a way that made it plain that he understood how much of the credit for "Brief Encounters" belonged to his wife. His eyes welled up with tears. "I never felt any pressure from her," he said. "Not even covert, not even implied." ♦

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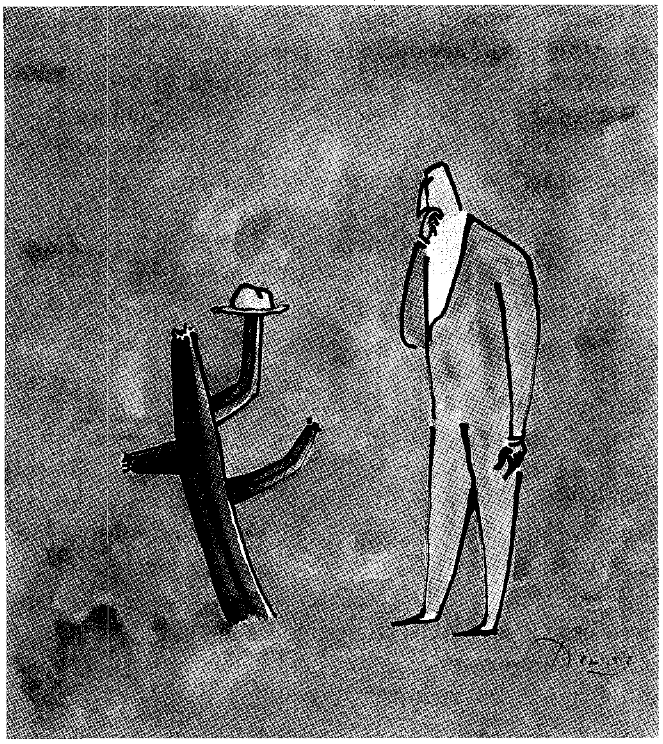
LIFE AND LETTERS

A DESERT ENCOUNTER

BY JOHN UPDIKE



BENOÎT VAN INNIS

In our fifth winter in the Southwest, my wife discovered that her gardening skills could be turned to xerophilous plants. All afternoon, she had served as my assistant and directress in pruning some ocotillo, and was enough exhilarated by the results to turn my attention to our overgrown hedge of mixed olive and oleander. Ocotillo is a tall, wandlike candlewood with vicious thorns and a feathery orange flower at its tip; handling it, even with thick leather gloves, requires the concentration of a bomb squad.

The electric trimmer I had borrowed for the massy hedge was dull and noisy. Further, the electric socket on our porch was distant, a hundred-foot extension cord away. I had to keep crawling on my hands and knees through gaps in the hedge to take the trimmer, trailing the gnarling extension cord, to the other side. And then there was the spindly aluminum stepladder that I had to keep shifting and leaning against springy branches to gain access to the hedge's overgrown top. Our condo sits on a slant, in the foothills of a pink-and-tan mountain range, which made moving the ladder one-handed and then balancing my weight on its higher steps feel heroically precarious.

My sense of triumph when my wife and I agreed that the job had been completed was marred by a mysterious circumstance: my hat had disappeared. Repeatedly getting down on my hands and knees to search beneath the hedge and circling the stony area of caliche where I had labored, I failed to find it. At this latitude, the elderly need to shelter their heads against the intemperate desert sun, and I discovered within myself an agitating grief in regard to the disappearance of the hat, a simple, brimmed floppy affair bearing the logo of an organization of which, years ago, I had been pleased to be elected a member.

Even as the shadows were deepening in the saguaro-studded mountain clefts, and the sun was lowering over the blue range to the west, I, with the circular compulsions of an aging brain, kept wandering out of doors, convinced that one more search in and around the hedge and the ocotillo would produce my missing headgear.

A breadth of paving passes close by the hedge. There, on the slanting asphalt, part parking lot and part side road, a curious confluence arose: an ancient man, brightly dressed in white trousers and a striped, starched shirt, made his ragged way downhill with the help of a cane, while, nearby, a Roto-Rooter operative in a khaki uniform was packing up his truck, at the end of his workday. Oleander roots work their way into the clay drainage pipes of our aging complex and obstruct flow.

The gentleman in white trousers greeted me as if we had often met before, though we had not. "What are you doing?" he asked, tilting his head to receive the answer.

I decided to be honest, however foolish it made me seem. "I'm looking for my hat."

The Roto-Rooter man overheard us. "Hat?" he echoed. "There's a hat over here."

By "over here" he meant the curb on the far side of the asphalt, where it had never occurred to me, in all my peering around and under the hedge, to cast a glance. The hat must have fallen from my head in the course of my awkward, preoccupying struggles, and the desert breeze that springs up in the late afternoon had moved it twenty feet away.

"My hat!" I exclaimed. "It is!" I hurried over and, as if to prove my ownership to my two new companions, put it on my head. "Thank you, thank you," I said to each.

The man in khaki smiled, his share of my pleasure appropriately moderate, as he coiled his rooter and distributed the last of his tools to their places in the back of his truck. The older man, however, bent and bowlegged as he was, made my happiness his own. Quizzically beaming, he came closer to me, the shadow of his cane elongating to the east, where the last golfers, calling to one another like birds at dawn, were finishing their rounds before darkness fell. "What does it say on your hat?" he asked me.

In the world of retirement, customary reticence is discarded, as needless baggage from the forsaken world of midlife responsibilities. We say what we think and ask what we wish. I was taken aback only for those seconds I needed to remember that this man had been a party to my finding what I was about to assume had been lost forever, my precious hat. I took it off my head and read aloud to him, in case his eyesight was poor, the words stitched on its crown. "American Academy of Arts and Letters," I enunciated.

"And what is that?" he asked, his eyes as lively as those (as I imagine them) of Socrates driving a pupil, question by question, toward an inarguable conclusion.

I did balk, a bit. My privacy began to feel invaded, and I could hear from behind the hedge the brittle sounds of my wife preparing dinner. Yet the other witness's silent eavesdropping and the benign mood of a desert sunset enabled me to locate a certain humor in his effrontery; I took the plunge and held nothing back. "An honorary organization in New York City," I explained, "that includes writers, composers, painters, sculptors, and architects. Two hundred and fifty of them, no more and no less. Fewer than one for every million Americans—think of it! Some years ago, the Academy celebrated its hundredth anniversary, and as part of the celebration all the members were given, in a spirit of dignified fun, hats like this."

I felt the sun reddening the western side of my face. My interrogator was slightly downhill from me, wearing, I noticed now, a hat of his own—a daintily checkered wool cap, with a bill too small to keep out much sun. His hair crept out from under its protection in white curls whose length suggested that he had not yet surrendered a youthful self-image.

"Isn't that wonderful!" he exclaimed. "Did you hear that?" he asked the Roto-Rooter man, who softly slammed his truck's back door. "Did you ever hear of such a nice organization? Writers, composers, painters, and sculptors, the best in the country."

"Well," I said, my embarrassment growing. "They'd like to think that. Some people would disagree."

"Of course," he said. "There are always those. There's always that."

"I was elected to it years ago. It cheered me up at the time." I refrained, modestly, from also telling him that I had been chairman of the anniversary observances. It all seemed long ago, and, at this distance of two thousand miles, rather preposterous. I had wanted everybody to dress up in formal clothes, but, in the event, only I wore a tuxedo. Arthur Miller didn't even wear a necktie. Yet my new friend could not be detached from his glow of approbation; it was as if he had, from my meagre description, bored straight into the inner essence of the Academy, its stately and élitist hopes for itself at its founding, more than a century ago—hopes long since run afoul of modernism, East Coast parochialism, the decline of print, and diverse scorn for any notion of a canon or an elect.

"This is so exciting!" he affirmed. A fresh idea struck him. "You *must* do something for me. Please. Could I dare ask you?" His bright eyes grew brighter. He took a step closer, uphill, as if he were about to impart a whispered secret. "Could I ask you to sign a piece of paper?"

I would have begun to suspect a put-on, an impish tricksterism leading to some intricate fraud, except that irony doesn't carry across the Mississippi; Ivy League graduates have to fly it over the nation's great heartland direct to Hollywood. Itching to turn my back on this encounter, I reminded myself that here in the desert people have a stake in one another, especially people over a certain age. We have come out here to put our striving to rest, amid barren landscapes and big-box stores. "I'd be happy to," I told the other old man, "but I have no paper, and no pen. Do you?"

Together we looked around for a piece of paper lying on the asphalt or among the cacti, and saw none. "What do you need?" the younger man called over to us. "Paper?"

"And a pen," the merry old gentleman said. Both items were produced, and, when I scanned the environment for a desk or lectern to sign at, a clipboard appeared. Sighing with the unexpected exertion, I signed my name. Still, my fresh acquaintance wanted more. "And the name and address of the organization," he said. "Did you hear," he asked our provider, who was patiently waiting for the return of his pen and clipboard, "what a wonderful organization he belongs to? It does all this good."

"You know," I confided to him, willing to be frank now that I foresaw our encounter soon ending, "this is beginning to be humiliating."

"I know." He smiled. "But isn't it nice? Writers, composers, sculptors." They were for him, it seemed, a faraway frieze, on the eastern rim of possibility. They loomed, as our membership had been intended to loom, as immortal. "And its phone number."

This was too much. "I don't know it," I told him, truthfully.

I had signed the back of a Roto-Rooter invoice. My petitioner tucked it, twice folded, into the pocket of his striped shirt, and handed back to the third man his ballpoint pen. "Hasn't this been something?" he asked the repairman, who didn't deny it. I could hear my wife calling my name, beyond the shorn hedge and the pruned ocotillo. Trash collectors will not touch ocotillo—it is too invincibly thorny—and my trimmings lay in an uninviting heap on the dusty, stony caliche. Slipping backward out of the old man's magnetic field, I looked for the first time at his shoes; they were not the bloated patchwork running shoes with which the elderly in the Southwest anchor and ease their weary feet but real shoes, two-tone wingtips, like those of a dancer in a musical comedy. Along with the point of his cane, they held him there, on the slant surface, defying gravity. Dressed with a brave brightness, he had been headed for some festivity, and had confused the festivity with me. The encounter, when all was said and done, had been no stranger than those in "Krazy Kat," which had given me my first idea of the American desert.

The dusk was threatening to enwrap us. The calls of the golfers to one another had been silenced. At our feet a sizable city had begun to display its shimmering grid. The Roto-Rooter operative moved, uncertainly, toward his door of the truck. I felt that some concluding statement was expected from me. "I am delighted," I announced, "to have my hat back," and tipped it, floppy as it was, to the two of them, first one and then the other, overcoming my fear that they might suspect irony, where none was intended. ♦

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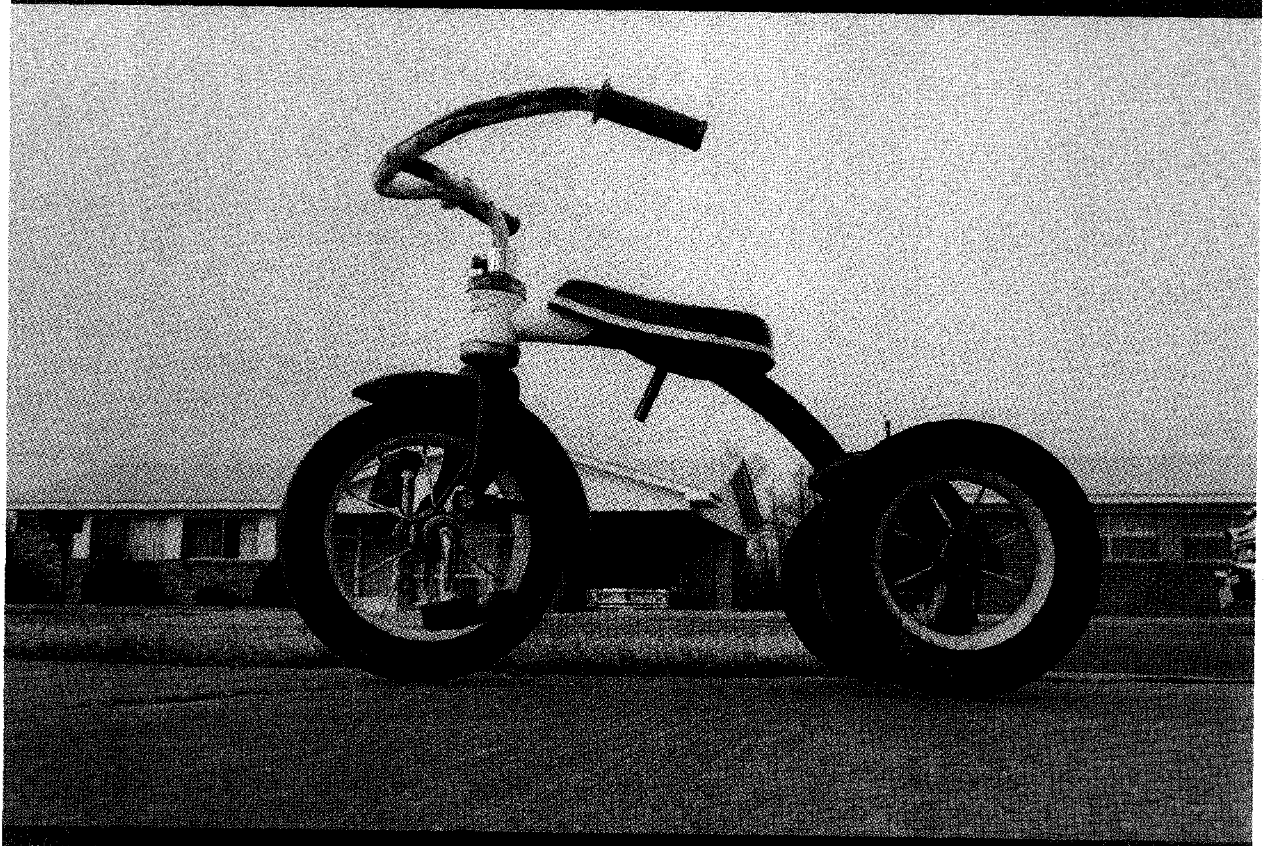

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BIDEN'S BRIEF

Obama picked his running mate to help him govern.

BY RYAN LIZZA

On a recent afternoon, Senator Joe Biden, the Democratic candidate for Vice-President, could be found inside a tent, pitched beside a pond in Claude Moore Park, in northern Virginia. His Secret Service agents, who were dispersed among the trees, formed a perimeter around the candidate; his motorcade, consisting of half a dozen cars, idled on a gravel road nearby. A portable toilet had been hauled into the woods and stood outside the tent. This was no wilderness; the park is in the suburb of Sterling, a place rich with potential supporters of Barack Obama. But the image of Biden relaxing at a picnic table in the tent, with his ten-year-old granddaughter Finnegan, who was cheerfully drawing on a napkin, gave the impression of a man not at the center of combat but off on a distant mission.

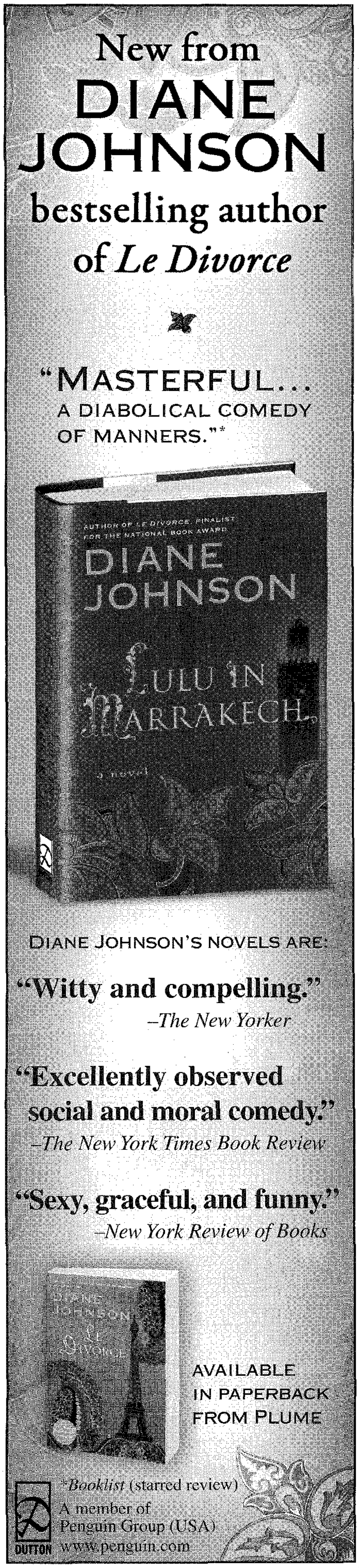
At George W. Bush's final State of the Union speech, in January, not long after Biden ended his own Presidential campaign, Obama approached him to ask for his support in the remaining primaries. Biden is close to Bill and Hillary Clinton (she once told him, "I think you and Bill were separated at birth"), and he said that he would stay neutral until the nomination was settled. "If you win, I'll do anything you ask me to do," Biden told Obama. Obama replied, "Be careful, because I may ask you a lot." They had another conversation in February, and Obama continued to cajole him. "The only question I have is not whether I want you in this Administration," Obama told Biden. "It's which job you'd like best."

During the primaries, which continued until June, Obama and Biden spoke about twice a week. "He'd call not so much to ask for advice as to bounce things off me," Biden said as we sat in the tent. "And then when he asked me if I would consider being vetted"—possible Vice-Presidential candidates must submit to a personal and financial investigation by the campaign—"I said I'd have to think about it."

Biden, who has served in the United States Senate for thirty-six years, wasn't certain that the Vice-Presidency was an improvement over his current position. "I've got a job I think matters now, as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee," he said. "Presumptuous for me to say, but at least—at a minimum—I've been able to influence the direction of the Democratic Party on foreign policy. And I've been relatively—presumptuous to say—relatively successful legislatively in the Senate, being able to win a lot of Republican friends, and being able to cross the aisle. And so it wasn't self-evident to me that being Vice-President would be a better job—you know what I mean?"

Biden agreed to let Obama's campaign team consider him, but with a caveat: "I wanted to make sure we understood each other—that, even if I vetted and he wanted me to take the job, I wasn't committing to do that. When the time was appropriate for him, if I was the guy, I needed to spend at least two or three hours with him to understand what the role would be." Biden wanted what amounted to an oral contract between him and Obama, spelling out his specific responsibilities in an Obama White House.

On August 6th, Biden said, the Obama campaign "smuggled" him into Minneapolis, where Obama was campaigning, and the two senators stayed up late in a suite at the Graves 601 Hotel working out the details of a potential deal. Obama told Biden that the vetting had gone well—Biden assured me that it was "very complimentary." Biden happens to be one of the least wealthy members of the Senate, although his family's joint income was more than three hundred thousand dollars last year. (His wife, Jill, has a Ph.D. in education and teaches at Delaware Technical & Community College.) His relatively straightforward tax returns



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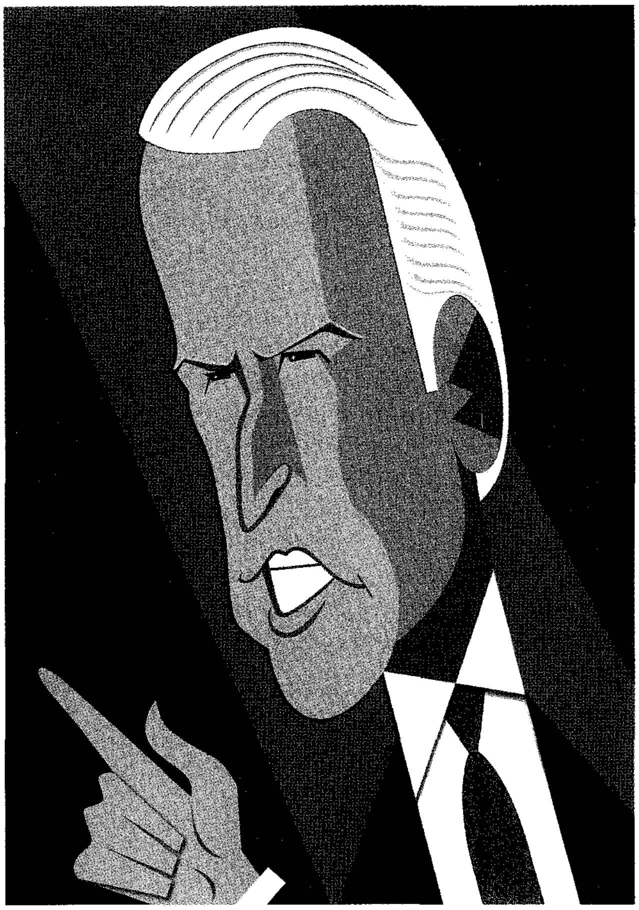
and uncomplicated financial situation made the process easier. "All these years and you still have no money," Obama said to Biden, teasingly.

The conversation in Minneapolis ranged from foreign policy and possible appointments to the federal courts to the legislative strategy that would be needed to pass an Obama agenda. Obama wanted to know how Biden had managed his signature achievements—such as the 1994 crime bill, which added a hundred thousand federally funded police officers to city streets. He also tested Biden's understanding of how broad his role would be, as opposed to that of another contender—apparently, Kathleen Sebelius, the governor of Kansas and the only woman known to be on Obama's short list. "He said, 'Well, you know, if I offered this to somebody'—he named her, a person—he said, 'That person would be very happy if I assigned them to reorganize the government.' And he said, 'They'd be very happy doing that. How about you?' " That didn't sound like much of a job to Biden. "No," he told Obama. "That's not what I want to do."

Obama also asked Biden whether he thought that he was more suited to a different position. "He said, 'You have a great interest in national-security policy, foreign policy,'" Biden told me. "He wasn't offering me this, but he said, 'Would you rather be Secretary of State instead of Vice-President?' And I thought a lot about that."



Powerful Vice-Presidents are often those with few assignments.

ROBERT RISKO

Biden consulted with his closest political advisers, including Ted Kaufman, Mike Donilon, and John Marttila, all of whom have been with him since the early days of his career. "They convinced me that I could have more influence on policy as a Vice-President with Barack," Biden said. "And so the bottom line of all of this is that I said, 'Barack, look, if you're going to ask me to do this, please don't ask me for any reason other than that you respect my judgment. If you're asking me to join you to help govern, and not just help you get elected, then I'm interested. If you're asking me to help you get elected, I can do that other ways, but I don't want to be a Vice-President who is not part of the major decisions you make.' "

In 2004, when John Kerry was conducting his search for a running mate, he divided his options into three groups, based on the electoral calendar. "Kerry said you can pick either a Mr. August, a Mr. October, or a Mr. January," David Wade, who was Kerry's press secretary at the time and is now serving in that role for Biden, told me. "In a perfect world, you have someone who is all three."

By Kerry's logic, Sarah Palin, the Alaska governor, whom John McCain named as his running mate, was an August pick, a choice made by a candidate who was falling behind and needed to re-start his campaign at his nominating Convention. An August pick can also help unite a party after a divisive primary. An October pick, too, tends to be political—someone with strong, even strident campaign skills, who might help to carry a state or a demographic group. Kerry's choice—John Edwards—may have fallen into that category.

August and October picks have become something of an anachronism, and in that way Palin is a throwback to an era when Vice-Presidents were chosen by party professionals, strictly for electoral reasons. In office, they had little influence; sometimes, at the whim of the President or out of political expedience, they were dumped from the ticket. Abraham Lincoln dumped Hannibal Hamlin for Andrew Johnson in 1864, and F.D.R. got rid of John Nance Garner in 1940 and Henry Wallace in 1944 (replacing him with Harry Truman). Probably the greatest failure in the job since the Second World War was Spiro Agnew—the relatively unknown governor of a small state, Maryland, with no experience of Washington. It is hard to avoid comparing Agnew's qualifications with Palin's, despite all the talk about her "maverick" spirit, her role as the first female on a Republican national ticket, and her presumed appeal not only to the "base" but to disaffected Hillary Clinton voters. Like McCain, Nixon picked someone he knew would surprise people. Like Palin, Agnew was unleashed to attack the élites of his day and the press—"an effete corps of impudent snobs."

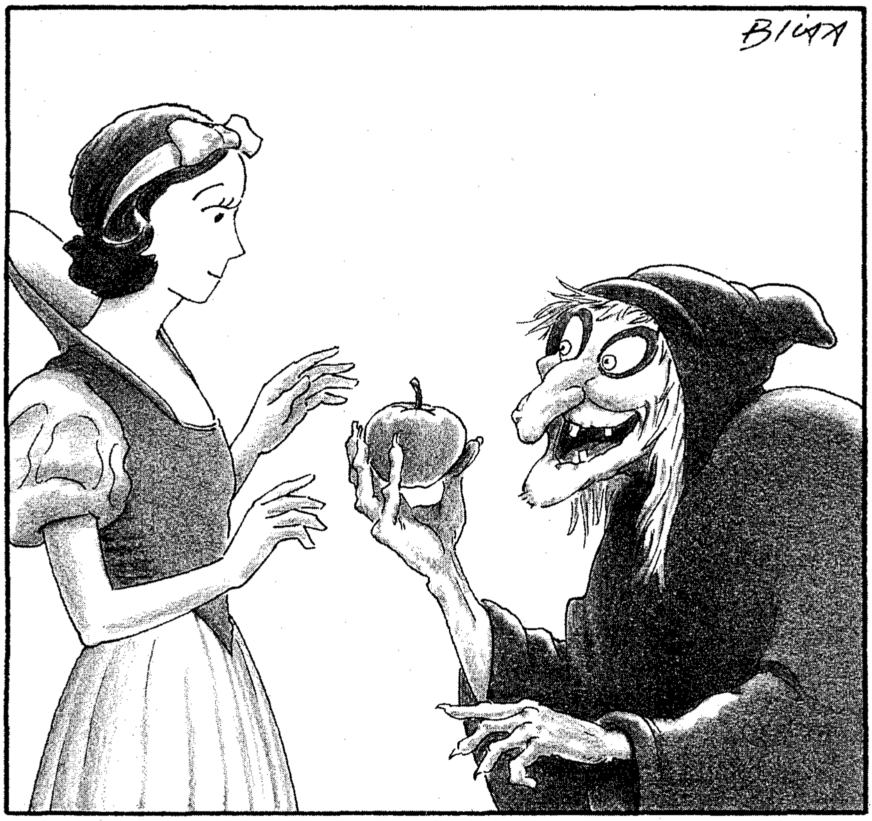
Every Presidential candidate professes to want someone with the ability to help govern the country, and, in fact, the January running mate has become more common. Not surprisingly, the most powerful modern Vice-Presidents have been politicians who had congressional experience and long Washington résumés—Walter Mondale, George H. W. Bush, Al Gore, and Dick Cheney. The January pick has increasingly become a good October choice, too. In recent elections, running mates chosen more for political reasons have fared less well than veterans. In 2000, Joe Lieberman, who had outspokenly criticized Bill Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky, and was selected in large part to help Al Gore distance himself from the Clinton sex scandal, was not a great help for Gore. Edwards, in 2004, was chosen partly for his campaign skills, though Kerry had reportedly wanted the more stolid Dick Gephardt, the former House Majority Leader, and was deeply disappointed at his performance on the trail and in his debate with Dick Cheney. There was certainly an initial burst of enthusiasm for Palin, and large crowds continue to attend her rallies, but she is popular mostly with an increasingly angry and frustrated Republican base and has been unable to stall McCain's steep descent in the polls; sixty per cent of the public believes that she is not qualified to be President.

The Obama campaign wants Biden to be seen as a working-class Catholic from Scranton, Pennsylvania, in the hope that he will win over skeptical Clinton Democrats in the Rust Belt and Appalachia. Although Obama seems to have chosen Biden partly because of his legislative experience, the campaign introduced him by emphasizing his biography—a moving story. Biden had a stutter as a child but eventually succeeded in a career where public speaking was a primary skill. He overcame enormous personal grief: his first wife and their thirteen-month-old daughter died in a car crash not long after he first won election to the Senate, in 1972. He left the 1988 Presidential race branded a plagiarist and a dissembler, and has survived two life-threatening brain aneurysms. He spent his next twenty years in the Senate rehabilitating his reputation, a period that Biden has called "my second-chance life."

Biden often attracts crowds of more than a thousand people (bigger than the audiences for McCain's pre-Palin events last summer). He usually ends his stump speech by saying, very loudly, that his father taught him that, no matter how hard he was knocked down in life, there was only one option: "Get up!" Biden repeats this, punching the air and baring his teeth until he is screaming and his face becomes flushed, his features twisted in apparent anger. It is not always a rousing moment; it's more in the nature of an appeal, and the crowd often falls silent as Biden reaches his crescendo. But then he connects his own setbacks with the problems facing the country. "America," Biden says, his voice a little lower, "it's time to get up!" With that, the audience is applauding wildly. Recently, he has accused McCain of attacking Obama at rallies but backing off at the debates. "In my neighborhood," Biden said last week, "when you've got something to say to a guy, you look him in the eye and you say it to him." As attacks on Obama by McCain, Palin, and McCain's wife, Cindy, grew increasingly personal, Biden said, "These guys are once again injecting fear and loathing into this campaign. I think it's mildly dangerous. I mean, here you have out there these kinds of, you know, incitements out there."

The week that I followed the campaign, Biden unveiled a stump speech that was a blunt and aggressive attack on McCain—on his economic policies and his ties to Bush. Biden has known McCain for decades, and the speech was all the more effective for that. "I love John McCain," Biden told a small group of donors sipping cocktails around a swimming pool in Charlotte, North Carolina. "John's been my friend long before he was a senator. Jill and I were with John when he met his wife, Cindy, and he was staffing me on a trip to China." He went on, "This is a good friend. When the Bush Administration"—he meant the Bush campaign—"was going after his character in South Carolina in 2000, I was a supporter of Al Gore, but I picked up the phone and called. He was on the West Coast. I said, 'John, where do you want me? Tell me where you want me to show up and I'll show up tomorrow and testify to your character.' So I'm not making it up about John being a friend." Having established his intimate knowledge of the man, Biden then shook his head sadly and added, "But ladies and gentlemen, I know John well. John does not disagree with George Bush on any single substantive issue."

Biden used that line of attack during the debate with Palin, on October 2nd, which was seen by seventy-three million viewers—more than watched either of the Obama-McCain debates. He continued to link McCain to George W. Bush, while praising Obama and promoting his agenda—the consummate Vice-Presidential candidate. Yet, unsurprisingly, Palin has dominated the coverage. The press section of Biden's campaign plane is dominated by young television reporters who don't get much attention from their producers in New York and Washington. One evening when I was there, several correspondents played Guitar Hero while a crew from the television show "Extra" threw darts at a magnetic board.



"Why, yes, my dear—it is organic."

On some days, only a single print reporter is covering Biden, and weekly studies of the news by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism note that Biden was the subject of between two and six per cent of all stories each week in September. (Palin was the focus of between fifteen and sixty per cent of a week's worth of news in that same period.) Pew has noted that Biden is "the virtually forgotten candidate," someone who "has consistently been an afterthought in the coverage."

Biden's time on the trail has been defined more by a series of supposed gaffes—morsels of content that are perfect for a Drudge Report headline, or a YouTube clip. His style does not play well in the modern media environment, and coverage of his gaffes has sometimes overshadowed the substance in his speeches, such as the moment when, at a rally in Missouri, he asked a state senator in a wheelchair to stand up. (Biden recovered well, joking, "You can tell I'm new.")

In the spin room after the Biden-Palin debate, I was knocked from behind and absorbed into a cloud of reporters moving in unison toward the Fox News set. In the center was Rudy Giuliani. Almost all the questions shouted his way were about Palin. Meanwhile, instant polls declared Biden the victor by a fairly wide margin.

The official story behind Obama's Vice-Presidential choice is that Obama was won over by Biden's ability to get support from Republicans in the Senate. In Biden's telling, Obama liked his sense of empathy, a trait that Obama shares, to judge by the finely sketched characters in "Dreams from My Father," his 1995 memoir. Biden told me that Senator Mike Mansfield, of Montana—who persuaded him to stay in the Senate in 1973, when he was distraught over the deaths of his wife and child—taught him that, no matter how reprehensible another senator's views, his job was to figure out what was good in that person, what voters back home saw in him. It may be a sentimental view of how senators treated each other in an earlier age, but Biden suggested to me that when he repeated that to Obama it helped to bring them closer—and he said that he and Obama would bring that approach to Washington. McCain, despite his claims of collegiality, has had dreadful relationships with some Republicans in the Senate—including the current Republican leader, Mitch McConnell, with whom he has fought bitterly over campaign-finance legislation—and would likely have more trouble than Obama and Biden in achieving his legislative goals in what is almost certain to be a Democratic Congress.

The Republicans to whom Biden is closest are Senator Richard Lugar, of Indiana, the ranking Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee, and Chuck Hagel, of Nebraska. (Both senators are close to Obama, too.) Lugar would undoubtedly be an important ally, but Hagel is retiring this year. As a longtime chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Biden was at the center of many of the hard-fought debates of the culture wars, and many conservatives still resent him for leading the fight against Robert Bork, Ronald Reagan's nominee for the Supreme Court. Bork, a strict constructionist, expressed his views freely, and Biden had little trouble using Bork's past opinions to embarrass him.

Yet, despite his decades in Washington, Biden has never become a symbol of liberal perfidy for the right. He was once regarded as a lightweight, even by some Democrats, but he has earned a reputation as a serious legislator. "He's a superb strategist," John Kerry said. "He has worked through some of the most contentious issues in the last thirty years, many of them in a senior position on Foreign Relations or Judiciary." Biden is the rare senator whose ideology has been formed inside the Senate rather than outside it. In his memoir, "Promises to Keep," Biden notes that his judicial philosophy and his belief in an activist government were shaped by studying and grappling with Bork's reading of the Constitution. Biden voted against the first Gulf war, in 1991, but for the rest of that decade he pushed Democrats to become more comfortable with the use of military force. It was Biden, among others, who urged Clinton to respond to the Serbian slaughter of Bosnians in the former Yugoslavia. By 2002, Biden's brand of liberal interventionism was the consensus view among foreign-policy élites in the Democratic Party. During the 2002 Senate debate over the Iraq-war resolution, Biden occupied the political space between Bush Administration unilateralists and antiwar Democrats. He pressed for a resolution that would have allowed the President to use force only to disarm Iraq. (In the end, Biden's proposal was undermined by Democrats who supported Bush's version of the war resolution.)

"I'm going to say something presumptuous," Biden said to me. "The reason I've been relatively successful is that I have never questioned the motive of other senators, and that's instinctively Barack. Barack doesn't start off, 'Well, you disagree, you must be a, you know, an S.O.B. or you must not care about the poor or you're sexist or you're racist or you're a whatever.' He doesn't think that way." Biden continued, veering slightly into stream-of-consciousness, "I think it comes from a guy who is, you know, who's half white and half black. You know, this idea—he is a black man because society won't let him be anything else. But he's as much his mother's child as he is his father's child. And here's a guy raised in an environment that was relatively normal in the sense that there was no—he wasn't able to be squirrelled away somewhere, or he didn't live in a homogeneous neighborhood where he was part of the homogeneity. You know what I mean?"

Biden said that the best model for him is Lyndon Johnson, who, before serving as John F. Kennedy's Vice-President, was the Majority Leader of the Senate, and who, even in the Kennedy White House, tried to remain something of a Senate man. "I would see one of my jobs as essentially being the president of the Senate in the sense of actually not presiding as much as interacting, continuing to interact, talking to Harry Reid every day or talking to Nancy Pelosi," Biden said, referring to the Senate Majority Leader and the House Speaker. "Johnson actually husbanded the relationships as Vice-President. He'd have senators down to his home. People knew—as they know about me now—that he understood politics in the broad terms of Congress, and he understood the detail of the legislation." He noted that his colleagues trust him. "I have never, ever, ever screwed another senator," he said. "I have never left another senator out to dry. Never. You will not be able to find a single senator from John McCain on, even though John

McCain and I are now going at each other—not personally but our policies—who would say that.”

If Barack Obama wins next month, Biden may find that personal relationships and his years in the Senate will carry him only so far. The idea of Johnson as a model is instructive, since the parallel between Obama, a neophyte senator, and Biden, his Capitol Hill tutor, is so similar to the Kennedy-Johnson dynamic. Johnson found that when he stepped down as Majority Leader his influence was sapped. His base had been the conservative Southern Democrats, and, once he joined an Administration they regarded as liberal—particularly on civil rights—he lost them. Johnson was often miserable, and the Kennedy and Johnson staffs didn’t get along. The J.F.K. people saw themselves as smart, sophisticated, high-achieving New Frontiersmen, and regarded Johnson as something of a hick—“Uncle Cornpone,” he was called, and not with affection. “You don’t want to be like Johnson, moping around all the time,” Kerry said.

Whether Biden can be a successful advocate for Obama’s agenda will depend on the relationship the two men have and on whether Congress believes that Biden has genuine influence with his boss. As Johnson learned, being a former member of the club isn’t enough. “You have to be the right kind of ex-senator,” Walter Mondale, Jimmy Carter’s Vice-President, and a senator from Minnesota, told me. “Senators have to believe that when they talk to you the President will know about it.” Dan Quayle, a former senator who became George Bush senior’s Vice-President, said, “He’ll find out when he gets up there that your fellow-senators don’t vote based on relationships. Those long-term relationships are helpful, but every man and woman in Congress does what’s in their interests, not necessarily what’s in the President’s or the Vice-President’s interests.”

During Bill Clinton’s first year as President, his most ambitious piece of legislation—a proposal to provide universal health care—was doomed as soon as it got caught in a parliamentary procedure known as the Byrd rule (named after the very senior senator from West Virginia). The rule prohibits “extraneous matter” from being attached to the annual budget bill known as reconciliation, which requires only a simple majority to pass. Instead, Clinton needed sixty votes to overcome a filibuster. “Clinton used to have some trouble with the Robert Byrds of the world,” Biden said, and suggested that he would help Obama overcome such problems. “People point out the other mistakes that Presidents have made in the first hundred days,” he said. “I predict to you that Barack will not make them.”

Biden said that Obama had asked him to start thinking about their early objectives. “Barack is the only guy when we were out there campaigning and debating each other who I knew thought about our agenda—his agenda,” he said. “I thought about my agenda. We thought alike.” Biden was impressed that Obama’s proposals seemed to be written with an eye toward passage in Congress. (For instance, the lack of a mandate in Obama’s health-care proposal could make the idea more palatable to Republicans.) During the primaries, Biden often played the role of policy grownup, the candidate who liked to chide the unrealistic plans of his rivals. According to a senior Biden aide, after a debate in which Bill Richardson, the New Mexico governor, argued that he could have all hundred and sixty thousand American troops out of Iraq in a matter of months—something that is logistically beyond reach, according to most observers—Biden approached Richardson backstage and told him that the plan was impossible. Richardson didn’t seem concerned. “I know it is,” he said. (A spokesman for the Governor said that Richardson does not recall the exchange.) In an Obama White House, Biden wants to be just as direct.

Hubert Humphrey may be a better Vice-Presidential model for Biden than Johnson—at least, the Humphrey who served in the brief time before the Vietnam War overwhelmed the Johnson White House. Like Biden, Humphrey was popular among his Senate colleagues and was fondly regarded as someone who talked too much; and he helped Johnson get his Great Society legislation passed. But Johnson came to mistrust his Vice-President, and Humphrey had less and less influence. Humphrey responded by suppressing his dovish instincts about Vietnam and becoming a public advocate for the war—a decision that haunted him. He and Biden became colleagues after he

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lost the 1968 election to Richard Nixon and returned to the Senate. Biden recalled that Humphrey told him that "his greatest regret" was that he didn't stand up to L.B.J. in opposing his policies in Vietnam. "I'll never forget that," Biden said.

Tony Blinken, Biden's top foreign-policy adviser, says that when Obama and Biden talked about the Vice-Presidency Biden made it clear that he didn't want the job to "be the ceremonial, go-to-funerals-and-weddings thing." Blinken added that Biden "also made it very clear to Obama that he didn't want to be a shadow Secretary of State." It was surprising to hear that Biden intends to stay out of the way of the State Department, but it suggests that he understands what might be called the Mondale Rule: that the most powerful Vice-Presidents are those who take on the fewest assignments. According to a history of the Vice-Presidency produced by the Senate Historical Office, Mondale once noted that, because the Vice-Presidency had traditionally been a backwater, its occupants undertook tasks in order to make it "appear that their role was significant." Yet, rather than amplifying their influence, these assignments entangled them in the bureaucracy. "I used to say I never wanted to do anything that someone else was doing," Mondale told me. "That's just busywork. It ties you down and takes time away from what is important, which is getting information and getting advice to the President on tough issues."

Dan Quayle's influence with Bush was curtailed by a heavy load of the kind of chores that Mondale warned about. "We met every morning," Quayle told me. John Sununu, Bush's chief of staff, "would go through the domestic agenda. Before I could even say anything he"—President Bush—"would say, 'This is a job for the Vice-President.' You get the things that the President can't do or doesn't want to do." Quayle also headed a commission on deregulation and was kept busy with foreign trips. "I travelled to forty-seven countries in four years," he said.

Al Gore studied this history, and his idea, according to the Senate Historical Office's study, was to be "a general adviser to the President, who took little direct responsibility over specific programs." That was why Gore didn't want to head Clinton's task force on health-care reform, "believing that it would consume all of his attention." Gore did, however, make a major exception to this rule by taking on a project to streamline the federal government—a task that Kerry told me made Gore less available to lobby his old friends in the Senate. "Frankly, I don't think Clinton used Gore for that very effectively," Kerry said. "I think when he was given reinventing government it put him on the sidelines."

According to Mondale, who spoke to Biden at the Democratic National Convention in August, Biden closely studied a memorandum that Mondale sent Carter outlining Mondale's duties as Vice-President. "I believe the most important contribution I can make is to serve as a general adviser to you," Mondale wrote. "The biggest single problem of our recent administrations has been the failure of the President to be exposed to independent analysis not conditioned by what it is thought he wants to hear or often what others want him to hear."

Biden asked Obama for little more than access and influence. By contrast, Sarah Palin seems to have greatly circumscribed her potential role in a McCain Administration. "My mission is going to be energy security and government reform," she told a crowd last month. "And another thing near and dear to my heart, it's going to be helping families who have special needs and children with special needs."

In one way, at least, the Dick Cheney model appeals to Obama: he represents the virtues of strong Washington experience, a close relationship with the President, and no hidden political ambitions. Unlike Humphrey, Mondale, Bush, and Gore, Cheney has not spent his tenure worrying about a future Presidential campaign, and, during conversations with Obama, Biden, who will be seventy-four by Inauguration Day, 2017, ruled out the possibility of another Presidential run. "I'm going to say something presumptuous," Biden said to me. "There's one advantage in having been around as long as I have. Everybody in the Senate knows me, and—I'm going to say something presumptuous, to repeat myself—I think most respect me." ♦

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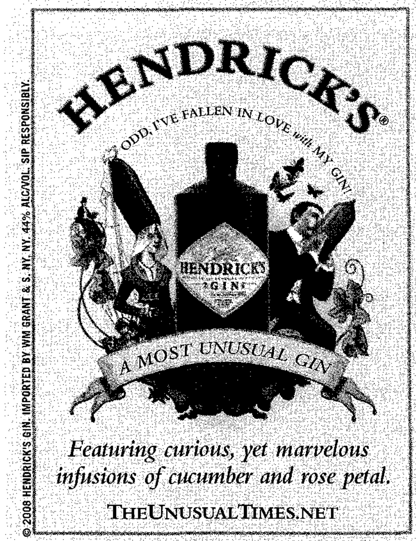

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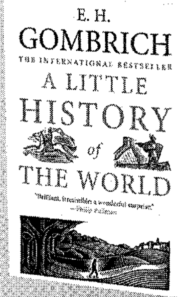

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THE OMEN

How an obscure Breton trader gamed oversight weaknesses in the banking system.

BY JAMES B. STEWART

On Monday, January 21, 2008, concerns about deteriorating economic conditions in the United States caused a precipitous fall in the Asian markets. Investors in Hong Kong and Tokyo besieged brokerage firms. Markets in the United States happened to be closed, for the Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday, but U.S. stock-futures trading in foreign markets showed a sharp decline. In the press, the day was dubbed "Black Monday." Fears of a worldwide financial collapse were so intense that the U.S. Federal Reserve held an extraordinary emergency meeting. Before trading began in New York that Tuesday, the Fed announced a three-quarter-point cut in the federal funds rate, the largest in more than two decades. The news initially caused U.S. markets to drop, but they soon stabilized.

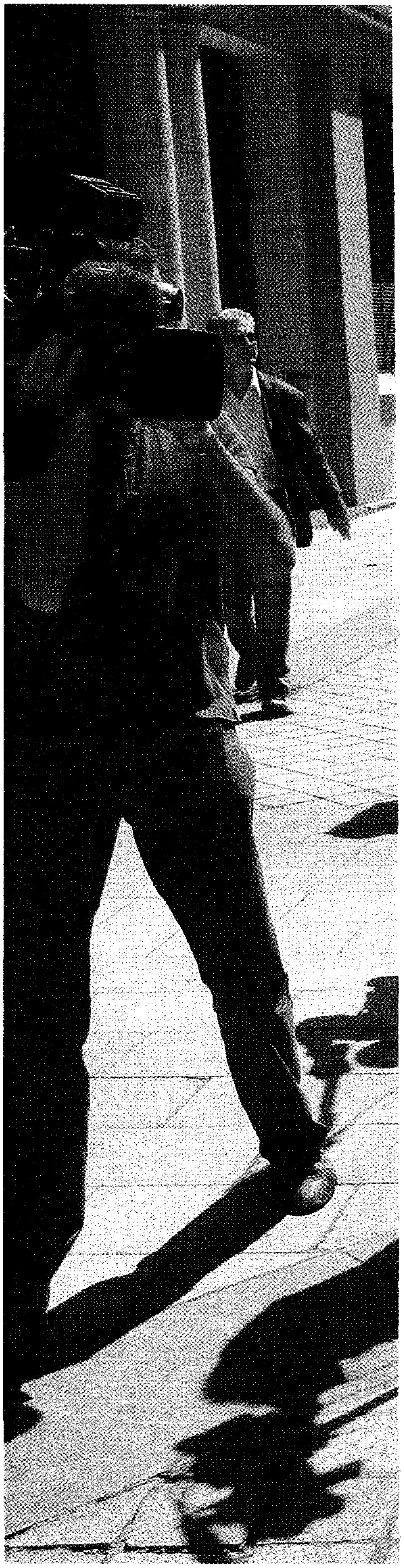
Two days later, representatives of Société Générale, whose innovative and sophisticated trading operations had made it one of the world's most admired financial institutions, asked that trading in its stock be halted. The bank had discovered that one of its traders had taken "massive fraudulent directional positions in 2007 and 2008," and that he had concealed them "through a scheme of elaborate fictitious transactions." The bank incurred a net loss of 4.9 billion euros—said to be the largest trading fraud in banking history.

The trader, a thirty-one-year-old Breton named Jérôme Kerviel, became an instant and notorious celebrity. Because so little was known about him, speculation abounded: that he might be at risk of suicide; that he had abandoned his apartment in Neuilly-sur-Seine, an affluent Paris suburb close to Société Générale's headquarters, and might have fled; that the police had discovered a Koran in his apartment, which suggested possible terrorist links.

Most baffling was the question of motive. There was no evidence that Kerviel had stolen anything, and he had none of the trappings of wealth. When the police went to his home, they found a sparsely furnished one-bedroom apartment; he didn't own a country house, or even a car. In interviews with the French police and a court-appointed psychologist, Kerviel claimed that his primary concern was to benefit the bank.

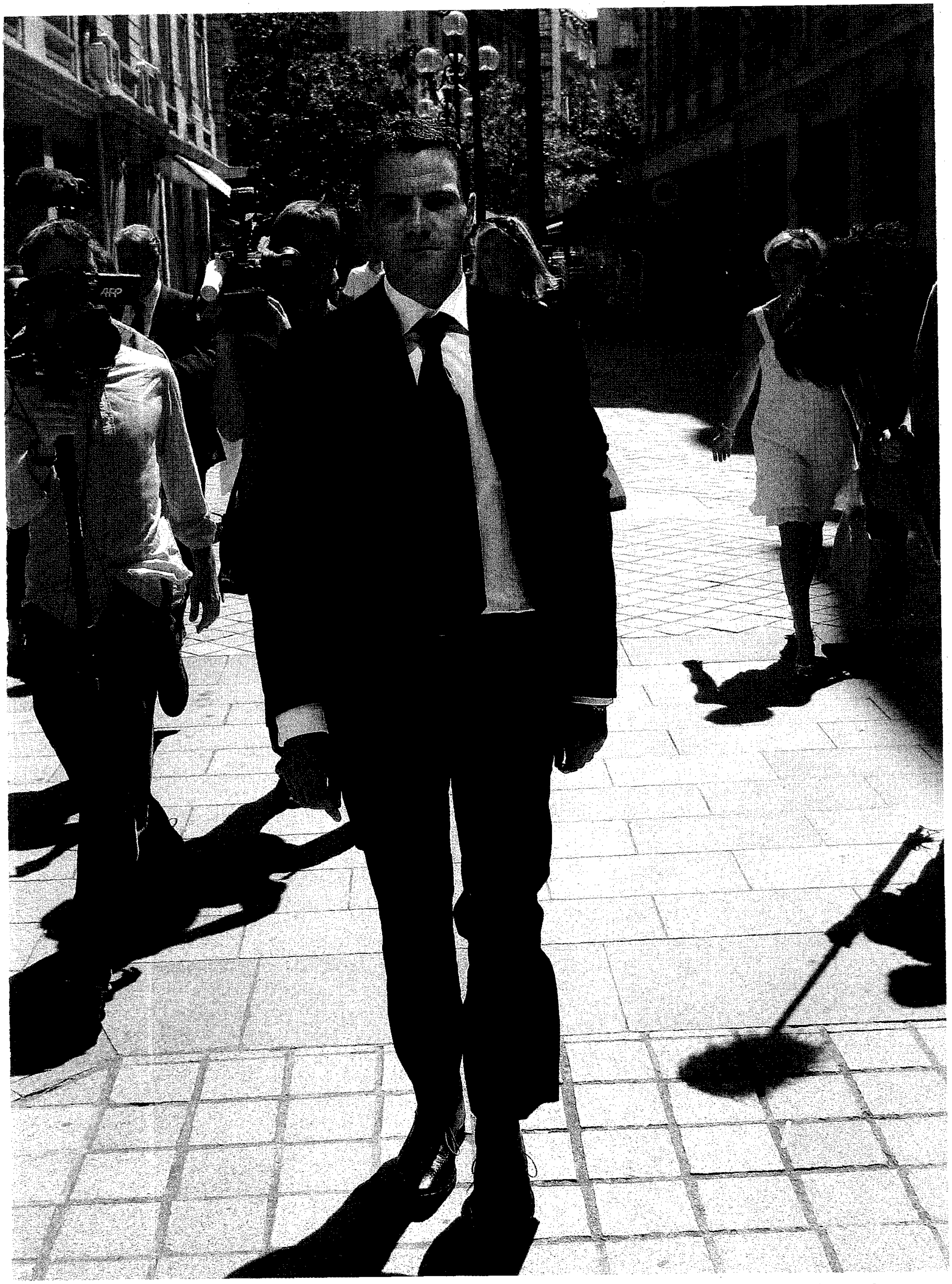
Société Générale's top officers and directors and their colleagues in the French business establishment considered Kerviel's activities an isolated case of fraud, according to an internal report. Jérôme Kerviel was a *flambeur* ("high roller"), a *joueur* ("gambler"). His ambition, greed, and, perhaps, even madness threatened not merely an august national institution but the entire international financial system. Moreover, as commentators in the press pointed out, the culprit was a graduate of a trade school rather than of a *grande école.* He had entered the bank through a side door—the "middle office"—and advanced beyond his station, affirming the practical wisdom of France's rigid educational system and its distrust of the dangerously romantic notion that anyone can reach the top.

But many French citizens saw the situation differently: Kerviel was the victim of a profit-obsessed bank, which largely existed to extract revenue from the struggling working and middle classes while enriching its top officers and shareholders. Surely Jérôme Kerviel, the naïve provincial, who was good-natured, hardworking, and handsome (his colleagues noted his resemblance to Tom Cruise), was manipulated and encouraged by his superiors. How could one person have amassed an exposure, as Kerviel had, of fifty billion euros without his superiors at the bank knowing? After his

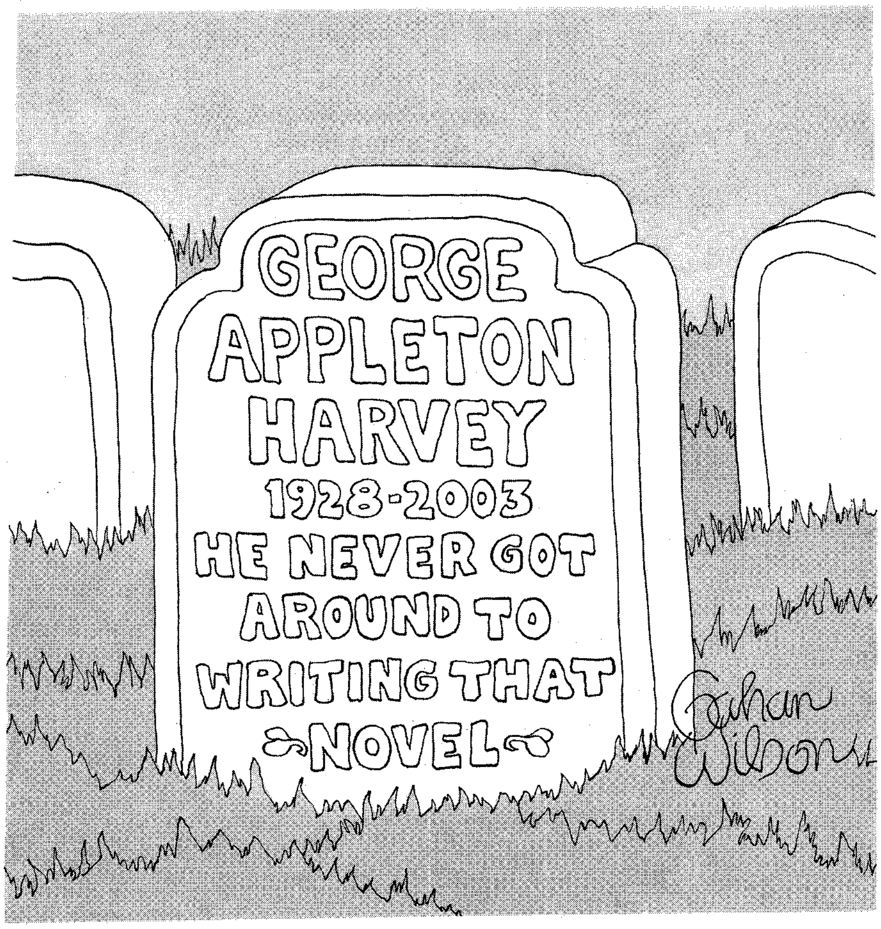


Jérôme Kerviel arriving at a hearing in Paris

AFP/GETTY



ly: *"I told myself that Société Générale would never fire someone who was generating this much cash." Photograph by Thomas Coex.*



photograph appeared in the press, strangers approached him on the street and in cafés, seeking autographs and offering encouragement. In a poll commissioned by *Le Figaro* a week after the bank's announcement of the loss, just thirteen per cent of the respondents blamed Kerviel for the scandal; fifty per cent blamed Société Générale.

Now that the financial world is enduring its most serious turmoil since the Great Depression, and public outrage is focussed on financial chief executives and their multimillion-dollar incomes, Kerviel looks even less like an isolated rogue trader, and more like a harbinger of systemic failure: the intricate investing vehicles that few understood; the impotence of internal risk controls; the moral blindness in the face of mounting profits; and, above all, greed. The F.B.I. says that it is investigating twenty-six financial institutions in the U.S.—they reportedly include Lehman Brothers, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, and A.I.G. Jérôme Kerviel may be only the first of many traders to face the prospect of years in prison.

Pont-l'Abbé, Jérôme Kerviel's native village, is in Brittany, near the westernmost point in France. It's a small settlement on an estuary off the Atlantic, where sailing boats dock just steps from a medieval castle and an ancient bridge. Signs appear in both French and Breton, a Celtic language with characteristic hard-"k" sounds, as in the name Kerviel. Jérôme and his older brother, Olivier, who also went into finance, grew up in a cottage on the outskirts of the village. Their father was a blacksmith who taught at a technical school in the nearby city of Quimper. He built a small foundry on one side of their house; a rose garden and neat hedges divide the front garden from the foundry's parking lot. Their mother owned a hair salon, and tended the garden.

Jérôme's mother and older relatives doted on him. He was well behaved at school, and as a teen-ager he often helped his mother at the salon. He loved sailing on the estuary and excelled at judo, which he taught to younger students. In the evening, the Kerviels debated current events and business at the dinner table, but the brothers attribute their interest in markets and finance to a teacher at the lycée who schooled them in the basics of economics and stock markets. Perhaps the most electrifying influence was the 1987 movie "Wall Street," which starred Michael Douglas as an Ivan Boesky-type arbitrageur and inside trader. The brothers weren't attracted as much by the central character, who is, after all, a criminal, as by the excitement of the trading floor.

France's free public-education system embodies national ideas about égalité and meritocracy. After the lycée, students who continue their education are generally steered into one of three tracks: a public university, a private higher-education school (sometimes inferior to the public universities), or a *classe préparatoire*, or *prépa*, an intense public school that prepares students for the entrance exams, or *concours*, which are a basis of admission to a *grande école*. The *grandes écoles* are considered the most exalted track. Whatever one's subsequent achievements, the first reference in any biography or résumé in France tends to be the name of a *grande école*.

After graduating from the lycée, Kerviel took the *concours* for the Sciences Po Lille, which specializes in European and international studies. When he failed to get in, he studied economics for a year at a university in Quimper, finishing first in his class. Seeking something more practical, he transferred to the Institut Universitaire Professionalisé, a kind of trade school, in Nantes, the largest city in western France. During his final year, he worked as an intern at the local headquarters of Société Générale, where a manager, impressed by his drive and his polite demeanor, encouraged him to continue his studies and to apply for a full-time position. Kerviel chose a program at the University of Lyon which focussed on oversight of investment banking. The course was taught by bankers rather than by academics and included an internship requirement, which Kerviel fulfilled in Paris at BNP Paribas. He earned his degree and accepted an offer from Société Générale.

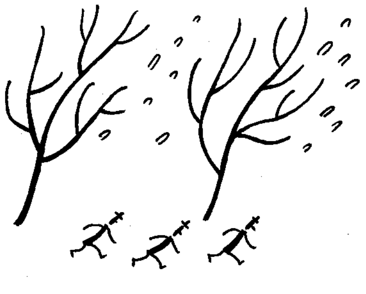
Founded in 1864 by order of Napoleon III, Société Générale pour Favoriser le Développement du Commerce et de l'Industrie en France—or SocGen, as it is known—was conceived by French bankers and railroad executives as a counterweight to Crédit Mobilier, which was owned and run by the Pereire brothers, members of a prominent family of Sephardic Jews; Empress Eugénie helped choose the bank's unwieldy but high-minded name. Along with other major French banks, SocGen was nationalized after the Second World War, remaining in government hands until 1987, when it was privatized and shares were offered to the public.

SocGen plodded along in the ranks of large, marginally profitable, and stodgy banks like Crédit Lyonnais and Crédit Agricole until 1997, when Daniel Bouton was named chairman and chief executive. Bouton, now fifty-eight, is of medium height and balding, with intense blue eyes behind rimless glasses. Golf and opera are among his passions; he is said to have an encyclopedic knowledge of Burgundy and owns a highly regarded cellar of grands crus. He is a member of what may be France's most exclusive group, the secretive Club des Cents, which meets weekly to savor haute cuisine and fine wines. Though not from a wealthy family, Bouton went to the best schools and has had powerful mentors. He was born in Paris in 1950; his grandfather was a gatekeeper, and his father died when Bouton was thirteen. At the age of seventeen, he achieved the highest score on the Concours Général d'Histoire and entered the prestigious Sciences Po, in Paris. He went on to the École Nationale d'Administration, the traditional training ground for the nation's élite, and then joined the government of President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. When he was twenty-three, he was appointed *inspecteur des finances*, and in 1988 was named *directeur du budget*, a position he retained until 1991, when he left the government to join SocGen.

Besides extending the bank's presence in Eastern Europe and Russia (SocGen bought a stake in Russia's RosBank in 2006), Bouton built SocGen's investment bank into a pioneering and profitable global competitor by recruiting heavily from France's École Polytechnique and introducing advanced engineering and math concepts, such as complex derivative-trading strategies. By 2000, SocGen had become a world leader in equity derivatives. Under Bouton's direction, the firm has grown to a hundred and fifty-one thousand employees, working in eighty-two countries; the corporate and investment banking division alone has twelve thousand employees, in forty-five countries. In July, 2006, *Euromoney* named SocGen the world's best bank.

Jérôme Kerviel arrived at Société Générale's sleek twin skyscrapers in Paris's La Défense district in August, 2000. He worked in the middle office, where he helped to administer the bank's database and, later, to implement computerized trading systems. In 2002, Kerviel accepted a transfer to the trading floor as an assistant trader, largely because the job offered the chance to build on his work with spreadsheets, a skill he had thought would prove useful. His former co-workers voted him *Trader le plus sympa*.

Unlike the middle office, the trading floor was frenzied. From his desk, Kerviel could easily listen to the conversations and phone calls of traders, and he was exposed to a dizzying array of derivative products. Most simply, a derivative is a contract whose value is determined by the value of another asset, and it allows investors to make significant gains or losses based on relatively small changes in the market. The most common derivatives are stock options, which are the rights to buy or sell a stock at a fixed price within a certain period of time. Their value depends on the price of the underlying stock. While derivatives can be an effective hedging tool for conservative investors, they also offer vast opportunities for highly leveraged speculations.



As an assistant trader, Kerviel worked for a succession of more senior traders, maintaining records and answering phones. He showed an unexpected aptitude for arcane derivative strategies and developed an avid interest in trading. "He was somebody who was experienced, with technical ability," a supervisor later recalled to a French journalist. "Helpful. He was seen as having good potential. He had new ideas."

By early 2005, Kerviel was working on the Delta One desk. ("Delta" refers to the rate of change in the value of a derivative compared with that of the underlying asset. In trading lingo, "Delta One" refers to a perfectly hedged position, in which any profits or losses are exactly offset—if a derivative loses a dollar, the corresponding investment will gain a dollar.) Kerviel became a specialist in a complex type of derivative product known as a "turbo warrant."

Soon Kerviel was earning a salary of forty-eight thousand euros, and he felt pressure to prove himself to his colleagues and superiors. "I had realized during my first meeting, in 2005, that I was not as well regarded as the others, owing to my education and my personal and professional background," he later explained to the police. (The police report is contained in the book "Cinq Milliards en Fumée.") "Because, you see, I didn't go straight to the front lines—I went through the middle office, and was the only one who did."

Kerviel observed that it was possible to carry out unauthorized trading on the Delta One desk. If the trade was "intra-day" (that is, exited within a single day), it wouldn't show up as an open position on the bank's daily account reconciliations. He began taking his own intra-day positions.

In July, 2005, Kerviel sold short some ten million euros' worth of shares of Allianz, the European insurance giant. As in all short sales, he borrowed the shares and sold them immediately, hoping the price would subsequently fall. Then he could buy the shares at a lower price and return them to the lender, keeping the profit. Of course, if the shares rose in price, he would have to buy them back at a higher price and lose money. "It just so happened that a short time thereafter the market fell after the London bombings"—of July 7th—"and it's the jackpot: five hundred thousand euros," he later said to the police. "I got the idea of a deal to cover my position. I had mixed feelings, because I'm proud of the results and surprised at the same time. It makes you want to continue; there's a snowball effect." Well versed in the accounting system from his time in the middle office, Kerviel learned to enter a false offsetting trade to divert attention from the unauthorized overnight position. "I made the decision very quickly, instinctively," he said. It was his first hidden position.

Kerviel says that he told his supervisors about the Allianz profits. "Their first reaction was satisfaction, naturally, although they told me . . . to avoid such positions, because I could just as easily have lost," Kerviel told the police. He saw this as a mild admonition, not meant all that seriously.

Beginning in February, 2006, Kerviel made false entries into the computer system totalling as much as a hundred and thirty-five million euros, and his earnings started to rise. He was pleased with the results, which placed him in the top ranks of SocGen's traders. "It gave a good image of our activity," he recalled to the court-appointed psychologist. "It made money for the bank. It proved that my models were good, and it repaid the trust that had been placed in me." An industrious worker, he was spending longer hours at the office, often from 7 A.M. until eight or nine at night.

Kerviel seldom took vacation time—something virtually unheard of in France, where long holidays are considered a God-given right. It also violated the rules of SocGen, which, like most other investment banks, requires employees to take regular vacations in order to detect any ongoing frauds. Kerviel attributed his reluctance to take holidays to the death of his father, from a heart attack, on February 23, 2006, an explanation that his superiors accepted. He wore the traditional French mourning attire, a black suit and tie, for a year.

In early 2007, banks in the United

POEM BY THE BRIDGE AT TEN-SHIN

This jungle poem is going to be my last.
This space walk is.
Racing in a cab through springtime Central Park,
I kept my nose outside the window like a dog.
The stars above my bed at night are vast.
I think it is uncool to call young women Ms.
My darling is a platform I see stars from in the dark,
And all the dogs begin to bark.
My grunting gun brings down her charging warthog,
And she is frying on white water, clinging to a log,
And all the foam and fevers shiver.
And drink has made chopped liver of my liver!
Between my legs it's Baudelaire.
He wrote about her Central Park of hair.

I look for the *minuterie* as if I were in France,
In darkness, in the downstairs entrance, looking for the light.
I'm on a timer that will give me time
To see the way and up the stairs before the lights go out.
The so delicious Busby Berkeley dancers dance
A movie musical extravaganza on the staircase with me every night.
Such fun! We dance. We climb. We slip in slime.
We're squirting squeezes like a wedge of lime!
It's like a shout.
It's what *minuterie* is all about.
Just getting to the landing through the dark
That has been interrupted for a minute is a lark.
And she's so happy. It is grand!
I put my mobile in her ampersand.

The fireworks are a fleeting puff of sadness.
The flowers when they reach the stars are tears.
I don't remember poems I write.
I turn around and they are gone.
I do remember poor King Richard Nixon's madness.
Pierre Leval, we loved those years!
We knocked back shots of single malt all night.
Beer chasers gave *dos caballeros* double vision, second sight—
Twin *putti* pissing out the hotel window on the Scottish dawn.
A crocodile has fallen for a fawn.
I live flap copy for a children's book.
He wants to lick. He wants to look.
A tiny goldfinch is his Cupid.
Love of cuntry makes men stupid.

It makes men miss Saddam Hussein!
Democracy in Baghdad makes men think
Monstrosity was not so bad.
I followed Gandhi barefoot to
Remind me there is something else till it began to rain.
The hurricane undressing of democracy in Baghdad starts to sink
The shrunken page size of the New York *Times*, and yet we had
A newspaper that mattered once, and that is sad,

But that was when it mattered. Do
I matter? That is true.
I don't matter but I do. I lust for fame,
And after never finding it I never was the same.
I roared into the heavens and I soared,
And landed where I started on a flexing diving board.

I knew a beauty named Dawn Green.
I used to wake at the crack of Dawn.
I wish I were about to land on Plymouth Rock,
And had a chance to do it all again but do it right.
It was green dawn in pre-America. I mean
Great scented forests all along the shore, which now are gone.
I've had advantages in life and I pronounce Iraq "Irrock."
The right schools taught me how to tock.
I'm tocking Turkey to the Kurds but with no end in sight.
These peace tocks are my last. Goodbye, Iran. Iran, good night.
They burned the undergrowth so they could see the game they hunt.
That made the forest a cathedral clear as crystal like a cunt.
Their arrows entered red meat in the glory
Streaming down from the clerestory.

Carine Rueff, I was obsessed—I was *possessed!* I liked your name.
I liked the fact Marie Christine Carine Rue F was Jewish.
It emphasized your elegance in Paris and in Florence.
You were so blond in Rue de l'Université!
The dazzling daughter of de Gaulle's adviser Jacques Rueff was game
For anything. I'm lolling here in Mayfair under bluish
Clouds above a bench in Mount Street Gardens, thinking torrents.
Purdey used to make a gun for shooting elephants.
One cannot be the way one was back then today.
It went away.
I go from Claridge's to Brands Hatch racing circuit and come back
To Claridge's, and out and eat and drink and bed, and fade to black.
The elephants were old enough to die but were aghast.
The stars above this jungle poem are vast.

To Ninety-second Street and Broadway I have come.
Outside the windows is New York.
I came here from St. Louis in a covered wagon overland
Behind the matchless prancing pair of Eliot and Ezra Pound.
And countless moist oases took me in along the way, and some
I still remember when I lift my knife and fork.
The Earth keeps turning, night and day, spit-roasting all the tanned
Tired icebergs and the polar bears, which makes white almost contraband.
The biosphere on a rotisserie emits a certain sound
That tells the stars that Earth was moaning pleasure while it drowned.
The amorous white icebergs flash their brown teeth, hissing.
They're watching old porn videos of melting icebergs pissing.
The icebergs still in panty hose are lesbians and kissing.
The rotting ocean swallows the bombed airliner that's missing.

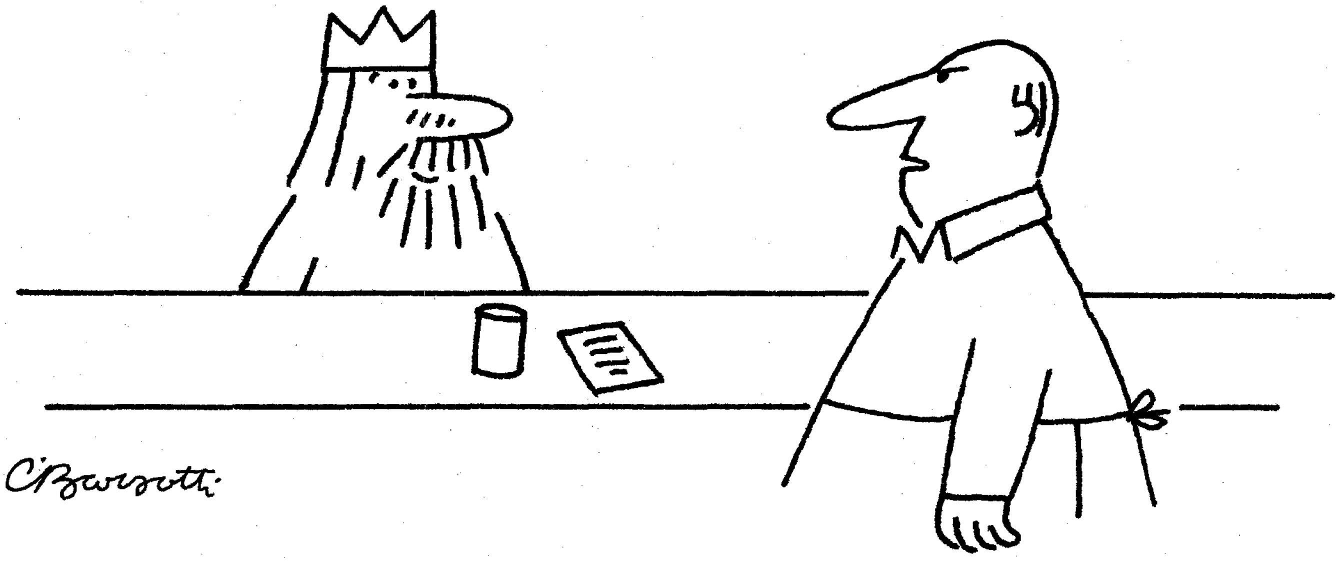
—*Frederick Seidel*

States began to notice an alarming rise in default rates among subprime-mortgage borrowers, setting off tremors in the vast mortgage-backed securities market. Still, the Fed seemed confident that the economy would continue to grow. As Kerviel followed the subprime revelations in the financial press, he grew skeptical of such assurances. During the previous years, he had limited his trading mainly to individual stocks. By 2007, he was taking large short positions on the German stock market, the DAX, betting that the subprime crisis would spill over into Europe and drag down the major averages. He created fictitious trades to conceal his gains on SocGen's balance sheet, but the fake trades did not hide the cash flow. Kerviel had to use SocGen funds to pay for the real contracts, but no money would have changed hands for the fictitious ones.

On a Saturday in late March of 2007, Jérôme Kerviel's mother called his brother, Olivier, from Pont-l'Abbé. Olivier worked in private wealth management at a small Paris firm. She had just spoken to Jérôme, and said that he sounded perturbed. But he wouldn't say what was wrong. She asked if Olivier would make sure that Jérôme was all right.

Olivier called Jérôme, and they agreed to meet at a café near Jérôme's apartment, in Neuilly-sur-Seine. When Olivier arrived, Jérôme was smoking, and he looked as if he hadn't slept in days. He said that he was suffering from stress. Convinced that global equity markets were likely to suffer from the subprime-debt crisis, he had amassed an eight-hundred-and-fifty-million-euro short position on DAX futures.

Global markets had indeed been shaken in late February but then had rebounded. Kerviel was used to markets moving against him, and prided himself on his cool head. He was so sure of his strategy that he had steadily increased his short position, which toward the end of March had grown to a staggering 5.6 billion euros. He told Olivier that he was not unduly worried. The problem was that he had hidden the position from SocGen's internal auditors with a variety of false entries



"Pay your tab—I don't want to be a duke."

• •

into SocGen's computer data. Compliance officers were subjecting him to ever more pointed questions about his daily trading. His answers were evasive or confusing, and he feared that exposure was imminent. Given the potential losses, his career seemed likely to end in a spectacular scandal.

The brothers spent the afternoon and evening discussing Jérôme's plight, his investment strategy, and the broader subprime crisis and its likely effect on global markets. Olivier advised Jérôme against liquidating the position. He could only attempt to deflect the compliance officers and hope for a market turn in his favor. In the days that followed, Jérôme and Olivier met frequently to discuss the new developments, often talking until 1 A.M.; they didn't trust the phones. The inquiries from SocGen's compliance officers intensified.

That summer, as Kerviel had predicted, the markets began a downturn. In August, BNP Paribas announced that it had temporarily suspended three of its funds, because asset values had become too hard to determine. The DAX, after hitting a record high in July of about 8,100, had fallen to under 7,500 by late August. A month after reaching his low point, Kerviel had made back 2.5 billion euros in losses.

Olivier urged Jérôme not to take any more hidden positions, and Jérôme agreed. Yet within weeks of his sudden reprieve he was again speculating, both on individual stocks and on a decline in the DAX, and covering these trades with fictitious ones. His intraday trading was also thriving. As he later told the psychologist, "Almost every day, I declared mind-boggling results." His colleagues started calling him a "cash machine" and a "star." Headhunters tried to lure him to rival firms, saying that they had heard of his remarkable results. "Everyone was super-happy, because we were blowing right through the ceiling," Kerviel recalled.

He earned forty-three million euros for the bank in 2007, which accounted for an extraordinary fifty-nine per cent of earnings for Delta One's listed-products desk and twenty-seven per cent of earnings for all of Delta One. He reportedly asked for a bonus of six hundred thousand euros but received half that amount.

Kerviel says he assumed that his activities had the tacit approval of bank officials. After all, there had been, by his count, a total of ninety-three *alertes*, or official notices, generated by his trading, and several of them, including those which appeared in the spring, when the hidden trading was getting under way in earnest, noted that counterparties were pending and that numerous trades appeared to be suspicious. "I thought it was incredible that no one came to talk to me about this," he said to the psychologist. "My positions made money, so, in a way, I told myself that . . . it legitimatized what I was doing." At the same time, Kerviel went to great lengths to continue his deception, enlisting a trading assistant to help enter the fictitious trades and on several occasions forging e-mails to appease the compliance officers.

On December 31, 2007, when many of his colleagues were off for New Year's, Kerviel was at the trading desk. In closing out his positions, Kerviel says, he realized a gain of nearly 1.5 billion euros, or $2.2 billion. To conceal the year's gains, he had created eight fictitious money-losing forward contracts. (A forward contract is a private agreement to deliver an asset at a fixed price at a future date.) If the stock market continued to decline, the positions would lose, thereby balancing the short positions.

On January 2, 2008, new risk guidelines went into effect in Europe as a result of the Basel II accord, an agreement reached by international banking authorities and intended to improve risk management. Many banks were now required to maintain higher levels of capital to offset investment risks like Kerviel's forward contracts.

Compliance officials questioned Kerviel about the eight forward transactions, whose size, according to the book "Le Joueur," caused suspicion. Kerviel had entered the name of Baader Bank, a German brokerage, as a counterparty. When asked for an explanation, Kerviel replied, "This materialized the give up of puts made late; I owe money to the counterparty. We'll rebook it a.s.a.p." According to SocGen's internal report, the risk-control officer later admitted that he did not understand this explanation. On January 9th, Kerviel annulled the contracts and was told that the problem had been resolved.

Despite this flurry of regulatory activity, during the first half of January Kerviel amassed a large long position on futures, betting this time on a market recovery. By mid-January, his exposure approached fifty billion euros. Others were also optimistic, and many economists predicted that the U.S. would not fall into recession. But on January 4th, following an unexpectedly bleak employment report, the Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped more than two hundred and fifty points, and continued to plunge during the following weeks. The first five trading days of 2008 in the U.S. turned out to be the worst start of a calendar year ever. In Europe, recession fears hit major stock indexes hard. The DAX, which had opened the new year at 8,000, dropped three weeks later to below 6,500, representing a stunning nineteen-percent decline. The more the market dropped, the more Kerviel lost.

Meanwhile, the problem of the eight fictitious forwards used to conceal his 2007 profits had not been resolved by the explanation that he had simply annulled them. Compliance officers, scrutinizing the data more closely, called for a meeting with Kerviel.

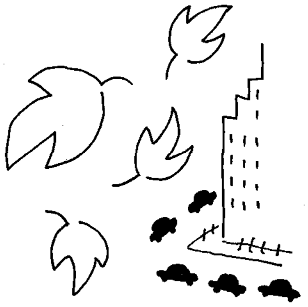
Kerviel said that he'd made a mistake; the contracts had been entered, but the counterparty was Deutsche Bank, not Baader. The meeting adjourned, but none of the compliance officials found Kerviel's explanations persuasive. They asked him for documentation.The next day, Friday, January 18th, Kerviel forwarded to the officials two forged e-mails with the subject heading "Trade Details."

Le Nouvel Observateur later published text messages sent that afternoon from Kerviel to Moussa Bakir, a friend and the broker through whom he executed some of his orders, saying that he thought he would be fired within the hour. Kerviel was planning to spend the weekend with another friend at a Normandy resort, to celebrate his thirty-first birthday. To his surprise, he was told that the regulatory matter had been resolved and that he could leave.

The next morning, Deutsche Bank reported that there was no record of the eight forward contracts between the bank and SocGen. Soon after Kerviel arrived at the hotel, he began receiving calls from his superiors at the bank, ordering him back to headquarters. He left without unpacking and returned by train to Paris, where Olivier met him at the Gare Saint-Lazare.

The phone calls from the bank persisted, and Kerviel replied to one, in a text message, "I don't know if I'm going to come back or throw myself under a train." How serious was he? When he sent the message, he was just outside the bank headquarters, far from a railroad track. But bank officials were alarmed that he might be suicidal, and not without reason: the previous summer, a SocGen trader had jumped off a bridge, reportedly after unauthorized trading losses were uncovered. So when Kerviel called to say that he was in the lobby, the bank dispatched a physician to evaluate his mental state. After concluding that he was stable, the doctor took him to a conference center on the sixth floor.

In addition to his immediate superiors, several high-level officials, none of whom Kerviel had met before, were present. Among them was Jean-Pierre Mustier. Known as Bouton's "dauphin," Mustier was a mathematics whiz who had graduated from the École Polytechnique and the École des Mines. He had helped establish the SocGen investment bank as a leader in equity derivatives.



Officials asked Kerviel first to simply explain what he had been doing. Still worried about his mental state, they apparently wanted both to reassure him and to get to the bottom of the mystery. He seemed evasive, and spoke of an "algorithm" he had discovered that, he insisted, had generated amazing gains: 1.5 billion euros in 2007. Confronted with the false forwards, he said that they were necessary to conceal the vast profits.

About two hours into the questioning, Kerviel asked to use the bathroom. Mustier, still worried that Kerviel might do something drastic—that he might even be armed—said that he'd accompany him. Trying again to bolster Kerviel's morale, he told him that the bank couldn't keep him on its payroll, but that it was counting on him to help sort through the trades. Mustier complimented Kerviel on his trading prowess. He said that he'd met many traders who had claimed to find a foolproof trading algorithm, but none had proved effective. Mustier told him, "If what you say is true, then you're the best trader I've ever met."

The interrogation resumed in the conference room, and Kerviel reluctantly described the mechanics of the trading that led to his huge gains. Later in the meeting, Kerviel was asked whether he had made additional bets on the market since his 1.5-billion-euro gain at the end of the year. "Just a small long position," he replied.

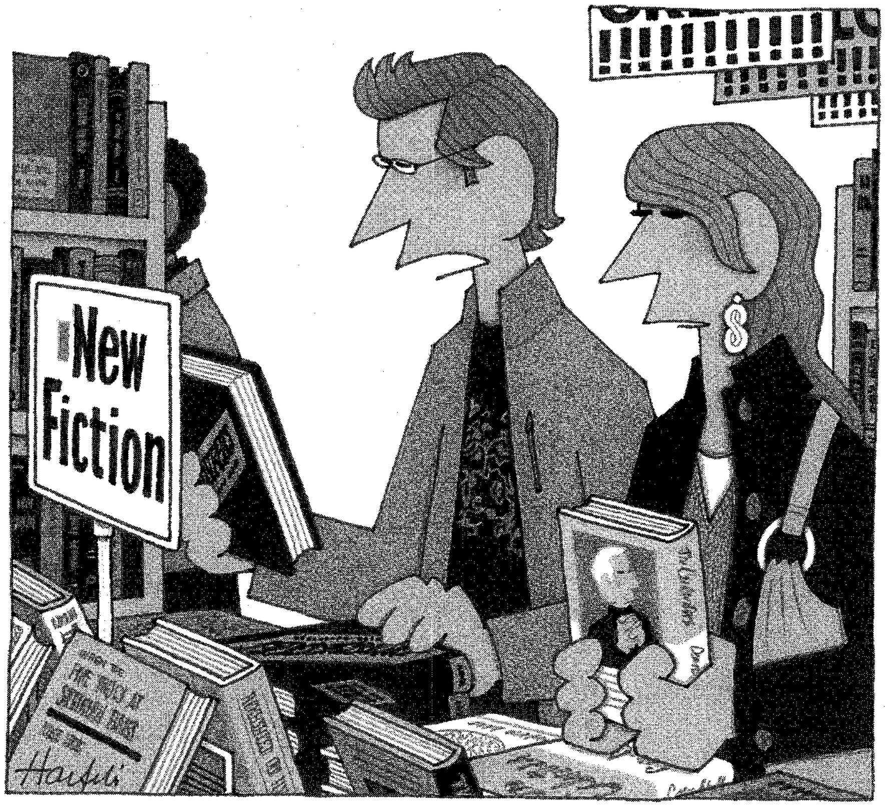
That weekend, Daniel Bouton, the bank's chairman and C.E.O., was at SocGen's headquarters preparing for an emergency board meeting scheduled for Sunday afternoon. Though SocGen was not as deeply affected by the meltdown in the American mortgage market as many of its rivals, the purpose of the meeting was to brief directors on an anticipated loss of two billion euros, which would be announced the following week. Similar losses at other banks were causing a global scramble among banks to raise additional capital. Meanwhile, lenders were so fearful of the creditworthiness of even the largest banks that they were increasingly unwilling to extend credit, even on short-term overnight loans. It threatened to be the worst liquidity crisis since the Second World War.

Bouton was discussing this situation with a few other bank officers just before lunch on Saturday. Suddenly, Jean-Pierre Mustier burst into the room and said that the bank had discovered an "undisclosed trading position." Mustier said that all the evidence pointed to a young trader named Jérôme Kerviel.

That night, a team of auditors and bankers began examining all of Kerviel's trading records from the prior year, trying to confirm the claim that he had made profits of 1.5 billion euros, and to locate any open positions. They couldn't invalidate the gain, but they felt that the trades weren't nearly as small or infrequent as Kerviel had maintained. By Sunday morning, they still hadn't made much headway in finding hidden open positions.

Kerviel returned to the bank at about ten o'clock that morning. This time, Luc François, a SocGen official, met with him alone. Unknown to Kerviel, a speakerphone broadcast the proceedings to a team of auditors and other bank officials. According to someone familiar with the exchange, François pointed to a pile of papers and told Kerviel they proved that most of what he had said the previous day was a lie. "I want you to tell the truth and nothing else," he said.

"O.K.," Kerviel replied. Then he said, "Everything I made last year I have lost." Only when François pressed him did he begin to identify specific positions. As he did, the auditors worked to pinpoint and assess the bank's exposure. Within an hour, they reported to François, on his BlackBerry, that the open positions amounted to fifty billion euros. François was stunned. He asked Kerviel for the aggregate of his open positions. Kerviel insisted that they couldn't be more than twenty-five or thirty billion euros—still an astronomical sum. François didn't tell him what the bank knew. He was worried that Kerviel was unstable or might commit suicide. After the meeting with François, officials told Kerviel not to return to work, to stay at home, and not to speak to anyone of these matters.



"I like novels where the protagonist is a thinly veiled version of me."

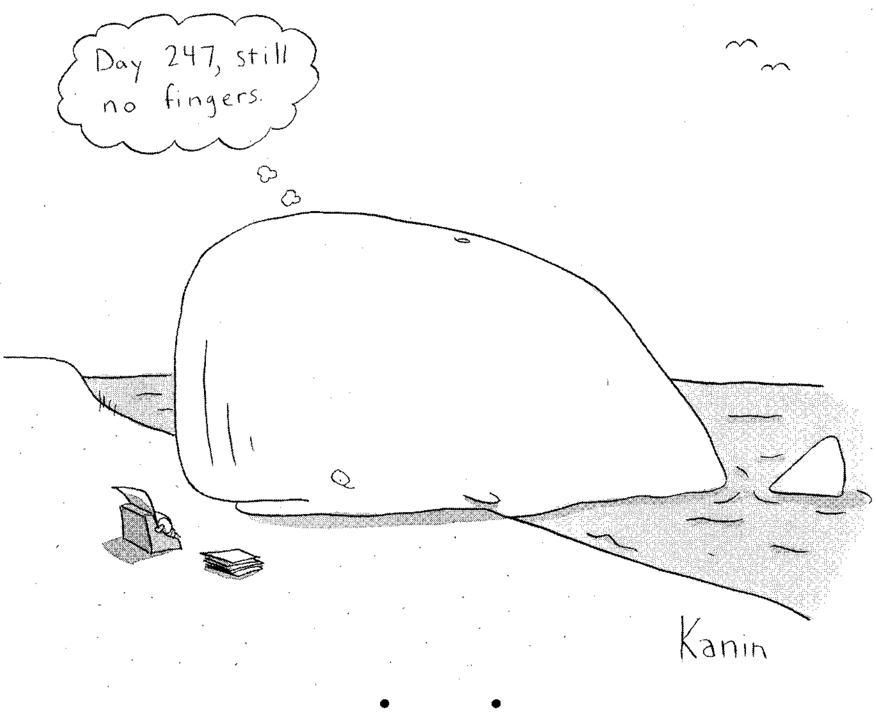
Mustier delivered the news to Bouton. The magnitude of the problem was almost unimaginable, and there was a serious risk that the bank could fail. Société Générale faced a loss of 1.5 billion euros and still had the unhedged fifty-billion-euro exposure in the futures market. The disclosure of this position might be enough to cause a run on the bank, triggering an international financial panic and stock-market crash.

SocGen officials decided that the position had to be liquidated as soon as possible, despite the falling markets. It would be reckless and indefensible to speculate further by holding on and hoping for a market recovery, and the bank was not in the business of betting on moves in markets. The selling had to be done in secrecy. Meanwhile, there was a risk that Kerviel might tell other traders, who would be in a position to make a fortune by short-selling SocGen stock, and even stock indexes.

Bouton called Gérard Rameix, the secretary general of the Autorité des Marchés Financiers, and told him that the bank would invoke a provision of French securities law which allows a publicly traded company to withhold information if such a disclosure would threaten the company's viability. Still, the bank would have to be prepared to make a statement in the event of a leak. In addition, he called Christian Noyer, the governor of the Banque de France, which has the primary responsibility for liquidity issues involving French banks. If word got out, SocGen might face a liquidity crisis.

That afternoon, the bank's top equity-derivatives trader was summoned. Mustier told him only that an enormous futures position had to be sold as soon as possible, without roiling markets. The SocGen trader was able to eliminate the entire position in three days. Nevertheless, SocGen's loss on the position more than tripled.

It's difficult to quantify how much of that loss was caused by SocGen's own trading. According to the bank, its trading while liquidating Kerviel's positions never exceeded about eight per cent of total trading volume on the



Euro Stoxx, DAX, and FTSE exchanges, but even this relatively small addition could have had a significant impact on prices. SocGen hasn't disclosed how many of Kerviel's futures contracts were sold and how many were hedged with equivalent short positions. In any event, the unrelenting selling pressure from SocGen likely contributed to the global sell-off and the mounting sense of panic.

On that same Monday afternoon, January 21st, after European and Asian markets had closed with major declines, the U.S. Federal Reserve hastily convened its emergency meeting. The Fed made no mention of SocGen, but said that in reaching its decision on the rate cut it had considered the "strains in some financial markets," and hoped that forceful action would ease concerns about "deteriorating conditions in financial markets."

A Federal Reserve spokeswoman said recently that the bank hadn't been contacted by French authorities and that no one at the time was aware of SocGen's predicament. Even considering the need for secrecy, this seems an extraordinary lapse in communication, given the interconnected global markets. Still, the Fed's interest-rate cut signalled that the Fed was prepared to act decisively. Stocks showed some signs of recovery on Tuesday and Wednesday. By the end of Tuesday, Bouton could take comfort in the realization that the size of the loss was unlikely to exceed ten billion euros.

By Wednesday, SocGen was able to determine that it needed to come up with 5.5 billion euros, which it would raise in a rights issue. That day, Morgan Stanley and J. P. Morgan confirmed that they would underwrite the issue. Kerviel's position had been unwound by the close of trading: the gross amount of the loss was 6.4 billion euros, apparently the largest single trading loss in banking history. That evening, Bouton offered to resign, but the board rejected the idea. As one bank officer put it, "When the ship is sinking, you don't replace the captain."

The next day, SocGen issued a press release and Bouton sent a message to all SocGen employees. Trading in SocGen shares was halted temporarily; in all, the shares fell by about four per cent. It could have been much worse—a loss of fifteen to twenty-five per cent could have set off an international panic.

On Wednesday, January 23rd, Kerviel received a text message from the SocGen doctor: "*Mettez-vous au vert*" ("Spend some time in the country"). She warned him that there would be an announcement soon and urged him to get out of Paris. Kerviel left his apartment and moved in with his brother. He called SocGen so that he and the bank could remain in touch. Olivier insisted that he contact a lawyer he knew named Élisabeth Meyer, and Kerviel sent her an e-mail with a brief summary of his predicament.

Kerviel was baffled by statements in the press that had come, apparently, from sources at Société Générale. He hadn't fled; he had taken refuge at Olivier's apartment, on the Rue de Rome, because the press had his apartment building under constant surveillance. He had been on the phone every day with the bank physician who was monitoring his mental health. He wasn't suicidal and had never been mentally unstable. And he certainly wasn't a terrorist. The Koran found in his apartment belonged to his girlfriend at the time, who was a Muslim.

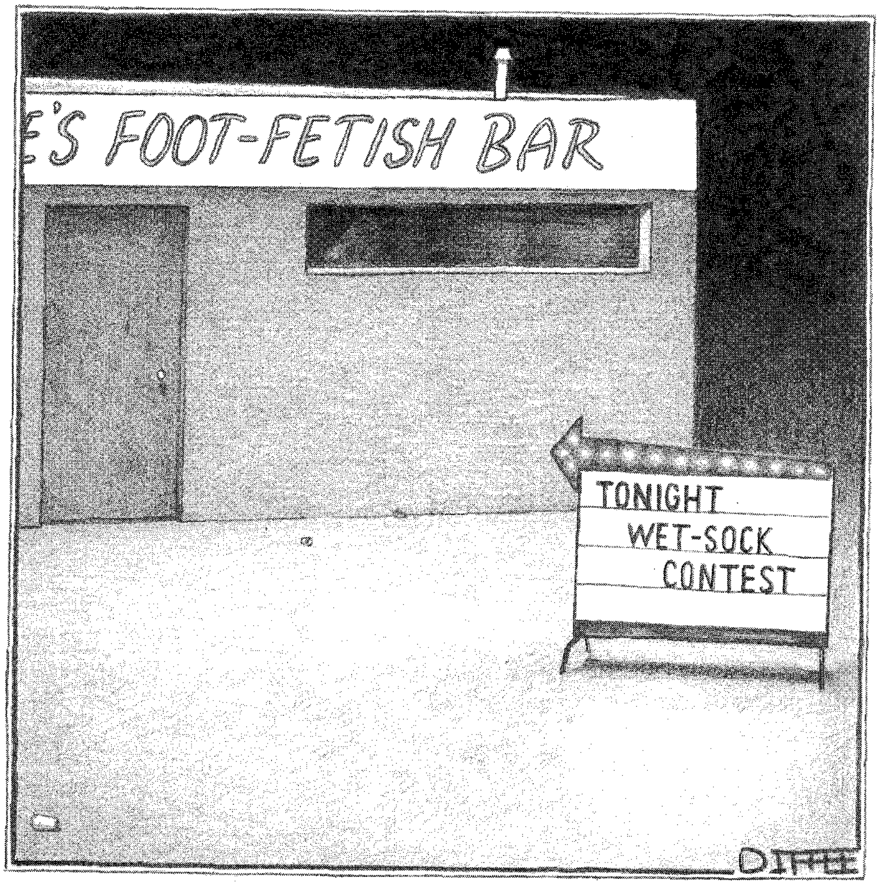
A week after being summoned home from Normandy, Kerviel began two days of interviews with the police. "I admit that I fabricated operations, I admit that I cancelled fictitious operations," he told his interrogators. "I admit having taken large positions that could be qualified . . . as outside the limits of my mandate, and which I masked by a fictitious transaction. I had several motivations in making those orders, but first and foremost I had in mind to make money for the bank."

At the same time, Kerviel pointed out the ways in which the hierarchy either knew or should have known about the scope of his trading—the numerous *alertes*, the e-mails from compliance officials, the elevated trading volume and cash flows on SocGen's accounts, the fact that he took virtually no vacation days.

"Why wasn't there any response, any reaction to that?" an interrogator asked.

"Because I generated cash," Kerviel replied. He later added, "I told myself that Société Générale would never fire someone who was generating this much cash."

The fact that his superiors might have been aware of his trading activity, ignored it, or even tacitly encouraged



it, along with the fact that he had violated no individual trading limits, seemed to complicate his case. A two-judge panel began investigating Kerviel on three criminal counts: breach of trust, forgery and use of forged documents, and unauthorized entry of data into a computer system. Each offense carries a maximum prison term of three to five years.

Two weeks later, on February 8th, an appeals court agreed with the prosecutor that Kerviel posed a possible risk of conspiring with others, and of compromising the investigation—standards that in France justify imprisonment before indictment. (There is no direct equivalent of habeas corpus in France.) When Kerviel and his lawyer, Meyer, arrived at the Palais de Justice for a hearing that afternoon, they were greeted by dozens of journalists, photographers, television crews, and curious onlookers. Kerviel, who was wearing a gray suit and a dark tie, waved to the crowd. At the hearing, he was informed that he would be taken to jail immediately, and he turned, incredulous, to Meyer. Four hours later, Meyer emerged to address the crowd. "I come out alone," she said, and subsequently burst into tears.

Kerviel was taken to La Santé—the nineteenth-century prison outside which the condemned were once publicly executed by guillotine—and placed alone in a cell in the so-called V.I.P. wing, which has housed, among others, Alfred Sirven (a head of the oil giant Elf, convicted in a corruption scandal), Maurice Papon (the former Vichy official convicted of crimes against humanity), and Jean-Christophe Mitterrand (the former President's son, on trial for illegal arms sales). Kerviel had brought no clothes, or toiletries. He was isolated from other prisoners and kept on a suicide watch. His only contact was with police officers and the psychologist assigned to assess his mental state.

Olivier had been trying to prepare their mother for bad news, but he hadn't been specific, and she was shocked by the media onslaught. The next day, Olivier gathered some clothing and other necessities, and took them to the prison. As the weeks passed, Kerviel found himself trying to figure out how things had deteriorated so suddenly. Why had SocGen unwound his positions so precipitately—especially on a holiday when American markets were closed?

Société Générale appointed a special committee of directors to investigate the Kerviel affair, and they, in turn, hired a team of lawyers and accountants. The committee released a sixty-nine-page report on May 20th. It concluded that Kerviel had essentially acted alone, although with the knowledge and help of a junior trading assistant. Furthermore, there was no evidence of any similar fraud within SocGen's investment bank.

However, the report included a catalogue of supervisory failures that reflected the lax regulatory climate, at least as it existed in the Delta One trading operations. The committee noted that Kerviel's superiors knew of intra-day trading outside his normal purview, which was trading in turbo warrants. His immediate superior, unnamed in the report but known to be a financial engineer named Éric Cordelle, didn't regularly consult the database containing individual traders' transactions, which would have revealed abnormalities in Kerviel's accounts. Cordelle, in turn, was given scant guidance for managing a trading desk; his priorities were undefined and his supervisory techniques were never examined by his superior.

On April 17th, the bank announced that Bouton would relinquish the title of chief executive but remain as chairman. Éric Cordelle was fired on May 23rd, and, in an interview with *Le Figaro* on June 4th, conceded that he was unqualified to supervise a trading desk. "The role of a financial engineer is to invent structured products and put them to work," he said. "I am not a trader." He noted that during this period the Delta One desk was "exploding" in terms of volumes of transactions, and added, "Why did Jérôme do this? I don't know. And why, on Friday, January 18th, when he was already caught but not everything was discovered, did he frantically continue to buy futures? I think I will never have the answer."

Bouton does not speak publicly about the affair, but he seems unable to contain his fury toward Kerviel, whose name he can barely bring himself to speak. To Bouton, it is especially galling that Kerviel has aroused such sympathy among the French public, a sentiment that might be attributed to an innate French hostility toward financial institutions and their highly paid executives and traders. As one official put it, "This wouldn't have been a surprise in New York or London. But in France it opened a window on the world of trading. How do they get such lavish bonuses? To many, this was the scandal."

Among the large team of lawyers SocGen hired to defend its interests in the affair, Jean Veil has been the most visible, dispatched to convey the bank's case to a skeptical public. Veil is one of France's best-known lawyers; he also represents former President Jacques Chirac, and his mother is the celebrated politician and women's-rights advocate Simone Veil. He has pressed the case that Kerviel is a liar, someone with defective moral character and an undistinguished education, who simmered with resentment over his comparatively small bonuses and failure to advance more rapidly. Still, Veil has acknowledged that his only interaction with Kerveil has been in court appearances.

Like many in the executive ranks, Bouton is said to be mystified by Kerviel's motives, since he realized little, if any, personal gain. It makes no sense that he would engage in such an elaborate, high-risk scheme simply to enhance his relatively modest bonus, or to bolster his reputation. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, SocGen had made detailed plans to thwart a terrorist attack on its trading floors. One official says, "We never thought about a single guy who could put so much money at risk."

The court-appointed psychologist, Jean-Pierre Bouchard, examined Kerviel at La Santé over three days in March, spending more than twelve hours with him. The report he prepared for the judges concluded that Kerviel had his "highest capacity in abstract and verbal intelligence . . . a good capacity for integrating and making use of general and social knowledge . . . satisfactory skills of attention, reasoning and analysis."

In short, there was nothing aberrational about Kerviel that might account for his behavior. But the combination of the financial and personal success derived from his hidden trading, plus the lax supervision by his superiors, which he took as legitimatization, "might have had a strong effect in the reinforcement of these patterns."

Kerviel's trading thesis—that equity markets would recover—was at least partly borne out. The DAX, after falling to below 6,500 when SocGen finished unwinding its position, had risen to 7,000 by early February. It dropped to a new low in March, before recovering again in April and May. Of course, there's no way to know what Kerviel would have done had he continued to trade during that period, and the bank, for its part, could not carry a fifty-billion-euro exposure and retain any confidence in its future once the position was discovered and disclosed. In the longer term, Kerviel's thesis was wildly off base. Markets resumed their slide this summer. Bank stocks were being dumped in near-panic selling, as credit and liquidity fears mounted. The price of Société Générale's shares on the Paris exchange hovered near ninety euros in early January. By early October, the tremors in the U.S. subprime mortgage market had grown into the worst banking crisis since the Great Depression. The U.S. had approved a seven-hundred-billion-dollar rescue operation, Britain announced that it would inject capital into its banking system, and Ireland and Germany moved to guarantee deposits in a continuing effort to stave off a banking panic. At the end of last week, SocGen shares closed at fifty euros.

Kerviel was released on March 18th, after spending five weeks at La Santé. Wearing a dark-gray suit, a pink shirt, and no tie, he smiled and waved to a crowd of waiting photographers, but he maintained a public silence out of deference to the judges and the ongoing investigation. Since his release, he has been preparing his defense and working for Jean-Raymond Lemaire, a computer expert who has an I.T. consulting business. Olivier is spending most of his time on the defense as well. After news of his brother's arrest, Olivier left his job. His boss told him, "Under the circumstances, I'm sure you understand we can't have someone with the name Kerviel working here."

This fall, the two-judge panel is expected to decide what, if any, indictments will follow. In July, Kerviel replaced Élisabeth Meyer and her legal team with a larger one co-led by Éric Dupond-Moretti, a high-profile criminal-defense lawyer. It is likely that Kerviel will be indicted, and will have to serve at least some additional prison time, if only as a deterrent to others in the international banking system.

However improbable it seems, Kerviel hopes to become a trader again. He would like to move to America and work on Wall Street, where he thinks he would be judged on his skills, not on his lack of a *grande école* pedigree.

"I accept my share of responsibility, which I don't deny," Kerviel told the psychologist. "But it must be acknowledged that I was not alone in this thing, that my superiors were indulgent toward my activities, and that the responsibility is not mine alone." He also noted, "When you're used to making five hundred thousand euros every day, at some point it becomes normal. The results, the numbers, become banal. You're happy, but it makes less of an effect on you. It's not an ego thing. There are people in the company who are far more brilliant than I am. I was one of the most discreet about results. Truly, my goal was just to increase activity." ◆

PROFILES

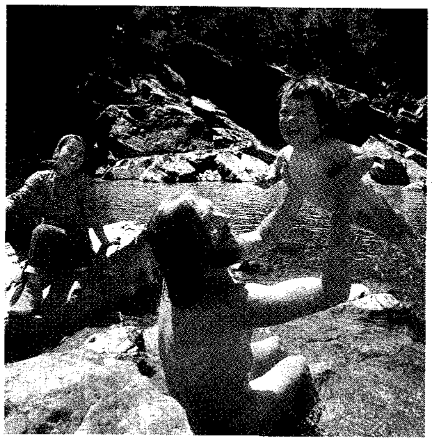
ZEN MASTER

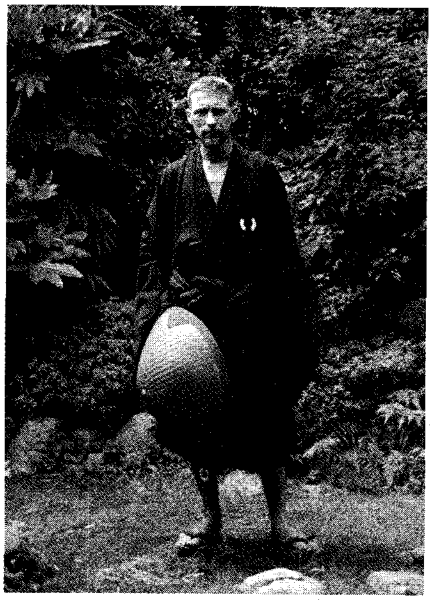
Gary Snyder and the art of life.

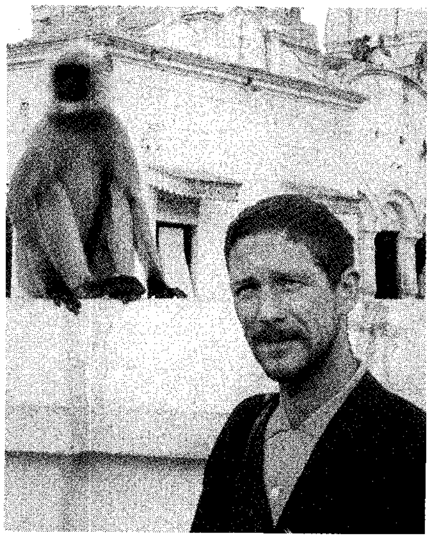
BY DANA GOODYEAR

Gary Snyder, the Zen poet, lives on a hundred backcountry acres in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, meditates mornings, and thanks his food before he eats it, clapping his hands together and saying "*Itadakimasu*," which is Japanese for "Thank you very much." He likes a boilermaker at dinnertime (a shot of bourbon and a tall glass of beer) and, on occasion, the bullfrogs from his pond. "I follow the 'Joy of Cooking,' " he says. "You've got to skin them and brine them overnight. She recommends rolling them in bread crumbs and frying them." He finds that vulture feathers make the best pens for calligraphy, and collects them when he hikes. Some nights, he takes a blanket and a thermos of *sake* and a star map, walks along a gravel riverbed not far from his house to a spot among the mounded diggings left by the gold-mining ventures of the past two centuries, and, by the light of a red torch, works on the constellations.

Snyder, who is seventy-eight, has written nineteen books of poems and essays that are engaged with watersheds, geology, logging, backpacking, ethnopoetics, Native American oral storytelling, communal living, sex, coyotes, bears, Tibetan deities, Chinese landscape painting, Japanese Noh drama, and the intimacies of family life. His reach extends far beyond the usual small audience for poetry; "Turtle Island," a collection of poems that won the Pulitzer Prize in 1975, has sold a hundred thousand copies. ("Turtle Island swims / in the ocean-sky swirl-void / biting its tail while the worlds go / on-and-off / winking.") He is, notably, a poet of the Pacific Rim. He told me, "I think of my territory as that which I have walked in person and know the weather at a given time of year, know a lot of the critters, and know a lot of the people. That would be from around Baja up to Alaska, through the Aleutian Islands, then pick up again in Hokkaido, down Japan and into Taiwan and the south coast of China, and the Pacific, which I know pretty well, having sailed it half a dozen times by a nice slow boat going fourteen knots, day and night." But if you met him in a bar in Japan or China or Korea, and asked him what he did, he'd probably say, "I do my best as a teacher and I'm kind of a clumsy farmer." (He taught in the English department at the University of California at Davis from 1986 until 2001, and has a small orchard.) The last book he wants to write, he says, is a "personal dharma memoir," a chronicle of Buddhism in the late twentieth century. "Like the rock climbers say, having fun doesn't mean you have to have fun," he says. "Being a Buddhist doesn't necessarily mean you have to be a good Buddhist."







TOP TO BOTTOM: PHILLIP HARRINGTON; ALLEN GINSBERG/CORBIS; JOANNE KYGER/COUNTERPOINT; OPPOSITE: CHRIS FELVER

A few months ago, looking over the wine list in a fine restaurant in nearby Nevada City, Snyder said, "I've got a twenty-five-year-old Cab I'm saving for venison—for when we get a deer again, on the road. In the winter season, I always drive with a giant black garbage bag in the car and a hunting knife or two." He pulled out a thick-bladed knife and laid it on the table. An appetizer of goat-cheese cakes, dotted with arugula pesto, kalamata tapenade, and roasted red peppers and truffle oil, arrived. Snyder lifted the knife and cut the cakes precisely in two. Later, when he got up from the table for a moment, a young, heavily lipsticked waitress came over and said excitedly, "He's one of my absolute heroes."

Snyder is shortish and solid and exudes physical confidence. A boy of the Pacific Northwest—born in San Francisco, brought up outside Seattle—he climbed Mt. St. Helens at fifteen; as a young man, he worked in Indian logging camps and fire-lookout cabins in the wilderness and on a trail crew in the Sierra Nevada, where he wrote the first poems that he wanted to keep. He wears

At left, from top, Snyder with his wife Masa and son Kai, in 1969; in Japan, in 1963; and in India, in 1962. Above, with Allen Ginsberg in 1996. Snyder says, "I am a poet who has preferred not to distinguish in poetry between nature and humanity."

a beard and has a turquoise stud in his left ear—it's been pierced since 1950—and has gray-green eyes that disappear into the planes of his face, like puddles in a dry season. One of his incisors is capped in gold, which gives him the rascally look of an old mountain man when he smiles. When I repeated the waitress's remark, he said, "You shouldn't have told me that."

MU CH'I'S PERSIMMONS

There is no remedy for satisfying hunger other than a painted rice cake.
—Dōgen, November, 1242.

On a back wall down the hall

lit by a side glass door

is the scroll of Mu Ch'i's great
sumi painting, "Persimmons"

The wind-weights hanging from the
axles hold it still.

The best in the world, I say,
of persimmons.

Perfect statement of emptiness
no other than form

the twig and the stalk still on,
the way they sell them in the
market even now.

Masa Uehara, Snyder's wife, sits on a rock—pretty, pregnant, her hair covered with a bandanna, wearing a long-sleeved shirt and jeans. The green Yuba River swirls around her. Snyder is in the water, naked, hoisting a naked baby boy (their first son, Kai) over his shoulder. The photograph ran as a centerfold in *Look* in 1969, with a caption that read, "Author Gary Snyder and family, in the Sierras, look forward to a new Neolithic age that will combine the love of nature, sex and life based on mythical truths."

Snyder was just back from Japan, having spent much of the late fifties and the sixties in Kyoto, undergoing formal training as a Zen monk. He had left the West Coast in the spring of 1956, several months after participating in what to many remains the defining poetic event of the previous half century: the Six Gallery reading in San Francisco, at which Allen Ginsberg first read "Howl" in public, while Jack Kerouac shouted, "Go! Go! Go!" Snyder read "A Berry Feast," an ode in praise of Coyote, a trickster figure from Native American myth: "Coyote the Nasty, the fat/Puppy that abused himself, the ugly gambler,/Bringer of goodies." The poem, which traces the destruction of forests to the building of the suburban house—"a box to catch the biped in"—is infused with the Buddhist idea of impermanence. It forecasts a time of "People gone, death no disaster," and ends with Coyote surveying a depopulated city where resilient nature still thrives—"Dead city in dry summer,/Where berries grow."

Kenneth Rexroth—the m.c. of the Six Gallery reading and a renowned poet, critic, and translator—was the presiding elder of the city's poetry scene, gathering young disciples around him for Friday-night instruction. Snyder had studied Native American oral traditions in the anthropology department at Reed College, and when he arrived in Berkeley to pursue graduate work in East Asian studies a friend took him to Rexroth's house. They hit it off right away. Snyder was translating the poems of the T'ang-dynasty mountain hermit Han Shan—an exquisitely terse and funny suite later published as "Cold Mountain Poems"—and studying *sumi* painting with the artist Chiura Obata. The conversations at Rexroth's ranged from discussions of Pound and Williams, both of whom he knew, to "The Tale of Genji" and the perfidies of Trotsky. "Rexroth was a great mentor," Snyder told me. "He was a polymath, universalist, critical thinker, and he declared himself an anarcho-pacifist."

Snyder's politics were similarly radical. He had grown up poor in Stumpland—logged-out country that backed up onto second-growth woods, in what is now a suburb of Seattle. His grandfather was a member of the Industrial Workers of the World (the Wobblies); his father, a sometime dairy farmer, was a union organizer on the Grand Coulee Dam project, and hosted meetings for a local league of unemployed workers, which was labelled a Communist front. At eighteen, Snyder joined the far-left Marine Cooks and Stewards union, and shipped out to the Caribbean for a summer.

Snyder dressed in thrift-store clothing and was proud of his working-class sympathies and his wilderness experience. Jack Spicer, another poet in Rexroth's circle, called him the Boy Scout. The day after meeting Snyder, Ginsberg described him in a letter as a "laconist, but warm-hearted, nice looking with a little beard, thin, blond, rides a bicycle in Berkeley in red corduroy & levis & hungup on indians (ex-anthropologist student from some indian hometown) and writes well, his sideline besides zen which is apparently calm scholarly & serious with him." Kerouac—whose manuscript "On the Road," about his travels with the feckless Neal Cassady, had just been accepted by Viking when he met Snyder, in 1955—was sufficiently smitten to write a novel based on their friendship.

In "The Dharma Bums," Japhy Ryder, a sprightly, cocksure poet with a background and a set of interests striking similar to Snyder's, introduces the narrator, Ray Smith, to Zen Buddhism and mountaineering. The story revolves around an expedition led by Ryder to the peak of Yosemite's Matterhorn, a trip that Snyder and Kerouac made together in the fall of

The original's in Kyoto at a
lovely Rinzai temple where they
show it once a year

this one's a perfect copy from Benrido
I chose the mounting elements myself
with the advice of the mounter

I hang it every fall.

And now, to these overripe persimmons
from Mike and Barbara's orchard.
Napkin in hand,
I bend over the sink
suck the sweet orange goop
that's how I like it
gripping a little twig

those painted persimmons

sure cure hunger

—*Gary Snyder*

1955. Kerouac's exposure to Snyder's self-discipline and know-how inspired more than literary productivity: he decided to become a fire lookout himself, and spent a summer on Desolation Peak, in the North Cascades, near where Snyder had worked several years before. Describing Snyder's deep effect on the Beats, the poet and playwright Michael McClure said, "Just look at Kerouac. He didn't go back on Route 66, hugging Neal and weeping big sad tears. He climbed a mountain."

In the novel, Alvah Goldbook (a character based on Allen Ginsberg) says of Ryder, "He's really the wildest craziest sharpest cat we've ever met. And what I love about him is he's the big hero of the West Coast. . . . Besides all the background he has, in Oriental scholarship, Pound, taking peyote and seeing visions, his mountainclimbing and bhikkuing, wow, Japhy Ryder is a great new hero of American culture." Ryder was also something of a satyr, and, in a memorable scene, demonstrates with a limber, gray-eyed woman named Princess the Tibetan cross-legged sexual position *yabyum*. (Princess is obliging, and everyone has a go.) Later, Kerouac wrote to Snyder about signing a release form. "As you see, I've got you down pretty accurate but I made some changes in your personal life, girlfriends, etc. . . . to throw off the scent."

"The Dharma Bums," which was published in 1958, incited a "Rucksack Revolution" and fed a craze for Zen. It made Snyder famous, but he was not particularly grateful. "Since Dharma Bums came out I feel that you've been silent and disappointed about me," Kerouac wrote to him. "I dont think the book was as bad as you think; when you look at it again in future years, when the world will've gotten worster, you'll look back and appreciate the job I did on 'you' and on Dharma Bumism." Snyder says now that although Kerouac's description of the climbing trip was essentially accurate, the rest grew out of his friend's imagination. "The sex scene in 'The Dharma Bums' was the result of me describing for Jack Kerouac Tantric sex in Tibetan Buddhism," he told me. "Jack was fascinated by that. I always say, 'Give the guy credit!' He could write a novel. He wasn't just always a journalist." That point was a shade too subtle for the rest of the world. In 1960, when Snyder got married in Kyoto to Joanne Kyger, an American poet whom he had met in North Beach, the display type in one newspaper notice read, "Zen Poet Wed / Kerouac Character / SF's Gary Snyder Married in Japan." (They broke up a few years later, though they remain friends, and in 1967 he married Uehara, a Japanese graduate student.)

Snyder's years in Japan were consumed with koan study. For his first, which took him a year and a half to answer, he was instructed to show what his face looked like before his parents met. He took the Buddhist name Chofu and early on fell in with some *yamabushi*—followers of an ancient folk religion that centers on mountaineering—who took him climbing. Snyder says, "They said, 'O.K., we're going to see if you are one of us.' They told me to climb up a five-hundred-foot vertical rock pitch while chanting the Heart Sutra. Luckily, I knew the Heart Sutra, so that was O.K. Then they said, 'Now we're going to initiate you.' They tied a rope around my ankles and hung me over a cliff and said, 'We'll drop you if you don't tell the truth,' and they started asking me questions. After that was over, they took me to a mountain temple with a dirt floor—it was small and dark and all smoky with incense—and we blew the conch for hours. I have some very wonderful overalls from them."

As a student of Zen, Snyder lived an existence that was austere, and sometimes humorless. Once, after he had finished a week of intensive meditation, Kyger wrote in her journal, "Gary came home last Tuesday after the sesshin and said he had passed his koan plus 3 auxilliary ones. He refused to contract verbs—saying I will do it, instead of I'll do it etc." When they went to India with Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky, Kyger told me recently, she coveted a "beggar's necklace" made of dozens of semiprecious stones—red, orange, green, creamy, amber-colored. Snyder let her buy it only after she had memorized the name of each one.

In 1959, Snyder published "Riprap," a group of short, tough poems composed, he wrote, to the rhythms of physical labor, and informed by his work laying cobblestones on the granite slab of the Sierra as part of a trail crew. The language itself is stony, a monosyllabic, Anglo-Saxon workingman's vocabulary that reverberates when struck: "Lay down these words / Before your mind like rocks. / placed solid, by hands / In choice of place, set / Before the body of the mind / in space and time: / Solidity of bark, leaf, or wall / riprap of things."

"I felt absolutely at home with the colloquial voice and the honest-to-god, honest-to-earth elemental content—the things of the poems," Seamus Heaney, the Nobel Prize-winning Irish poet, said about his initial encounter with Snyder's poems. "There is something unleavened about that first book. The elements of the poems are trustworthy, and you feel there's a real coherence in the sensibility that's transmitting them to you. And, in the primal, mythic-poetry sense, he's back on the Hill of Parnassus."

In the middle of June, Snyder visited New York for a long weekend. With his younger son, Gen, who is thirty-eight, he went twice to the Met. They looked at rare pre-Columbian feather-working, Himalayan art, and samurai gear, and visited an exhibit on Chinese painting and calligraphy. "For one who knows the nature of the East Asian brush and what's possible, it was somewhat elementary, but very useful for the usual viewer," he wrote to me later.

On the Saturday of the trip, wearing jeans, a vest, and a long skull-and-bead necklace—a symbol of impermanence that he picked up at a Buddhist supply shop in Kyoto—Snyder reported to the Asia Society, on the Upper East Side, for a symposium devoted to his travels through India with Kyger, Ginsberg, and Orlovsky. "One of the most significant and transformative things for me was discovering the depth of time in the mythologies of India," Snyder told the audience. "That we live in a universe of millions of universes that has gone through millions and millions of years, kalpa after kalpa, aeon after aeon." Then he told a story about how he once blew the mind of Francis Crick, over lunch, when he explained to him that the Indian belief in reincarnation demonstrated an understanding of deep space and the history of the universe.

Performance is an essential part of Snyder's poetry; it was the Six Gallery reading, he says, that first awakened him to the possibility of an oral poetry in America. "It made us realize that poetry was a social experience, more like storytelling," he says. Reading aloud is crucial to his process; he improvises, makes substitutions, supplies glosses on difficult words. Sometimes he sings a poem, or gestures with his hands, like a conductor before an orchestra. In India, he attended an all-night poetry reading, and several years ago he tried one himself, with dancers, musicians, and costumes. At the Asia Society, he was brief, reading one ten-minute poem: "An Offering for Tara"—the Buddhist goddess of compassion. The poem is one of his more esoteric works, a multivoiced, choral setting, but he didn't worry about comprehensibility. He says, "When people tell me they don't understand a poem, I say, 'Fine, just listen to it. The exposure to it is part of its power. Don't vex yourself with an intellectual understanding of it.' We don't expect to understand graphic art that way." Snyder read with his heels clicked together in back, a dancer in first position. He leaned into the stresses as if boosted by an updraft, making of each word a surprising curiosity. When he got to a Sanskrit prayer, "*Om tare tuttare ture swaha tare tare tare*," he chanted it—resonant, rapid, low. The audience was suffused with happy, baffled pleasure and good vibes.

Snyder sat down in the audience. Ed Sanders, of the Fugs, sang a reedy song to Ginsberg, "He was one of me *hee-eeee-roes*." There was talk of "Omic laryngitis" and the Human Be-In, which Snyder opened by blowing on a conch. Ginsberg's old harmonium was trotted out. Meanwhile, Snyder got to work. He put on a pair of glasses, and took a small notebook from the front pocket of his shirt. He paged through it, periodically jotting something down. Every once in a while, at the end of a number, he'd look up, remove his glasses and rub his eyes, and then resume note-taking.

"I live in the present. That's why I get things done in the present," Snyder told me later, explaining his impatience at being called a Beat writer. "I'm not a Beat in a literary sense," he said. "I'm a historical part of that circle of friends, and I was part of the early sociological and cultural effect of it. My work did not fit with the critics' and the media's idea of Beat writing, ever. We were all so different from each other, all these unique cases. That makes it really kind of untidy." Another time, he said, "Why I distanced myself from the Beats? Allen and I had that out even when we were in our twenties. We had mutual respect, and mutual disagreement. I am very symptomatic of the West Coast, and the West Coast is a slightly different culture from the rest of the country."

Kitkitdizze, named for a local plant, is Snyder's place. It is on the San Juan Ridge, in the Yuba River watershed. "My pond runs right past San Francisco," he says. "It goes into the creek downhill, from there into the South Yuba, then to the Feather, the Sacramento, through the delta to San Francisco Bay, and on out to the Pacific."

Snyder bought the land in the mid-sixties, with Allen Ginsberg and Richard Baker, then the president of the San Francisco Zen Center. (Snyder bought them out, and Gen now lives in Bedrock Mortar, the twenty-by-twenty cabin that Ginsberg built, inscribing "HARE KRISHNA HARE KRISHNA JAI GURU RAMA OM HUM" on its foundation.) Snyder's house is low-browed, and roofed in red tiles; the stain is grayish to match the woods around it, and the trim is the orange-red of manzanita bark. (He took a branch to a paint store and had the supplier mix the shade accordingly.) The floor in the kitchen is made from sandstone that Snyder harvested from California's White Mountains, at nine thousand feet. "The job is very amateurish, not as smooth as it could be," he said when I visited him there in late June. "It's the first stone floor I ever laid." The center of the house, now occupied by a dining-room table stacked with books and periodicals, was once an open fire pit, over which a huge kettle would hang, suspended from a hook that Snyder had carved out of an oak crotch that he found. A gable covers the old smoke hole.

In 1969, Snyder sought ten volunteers to help him build a home that was to be part Japanese farmhouse, part Indian lodge. They came—some from Berkeley, some from Antioch College—in the summer of 1970, and, with Snyder and Uehara, built the house in a few months, using ponderosa pines from within three hundred feet of the site to frame, and local incense cedar for siding. The foundation stones came from the middle fork of the Yuba River. There was no electricity (Kitkitdizze is still off the grid, and nowadays runs on solar and generators), so they felled the trees with a two-man handsaw. Days were hot and nakedness prevailed.

Many of Snyder's poems come straight

from his life. The topless women carpenters inspired "Alabaster," published in a mid-eighties collection, "Left Out in the Rain":

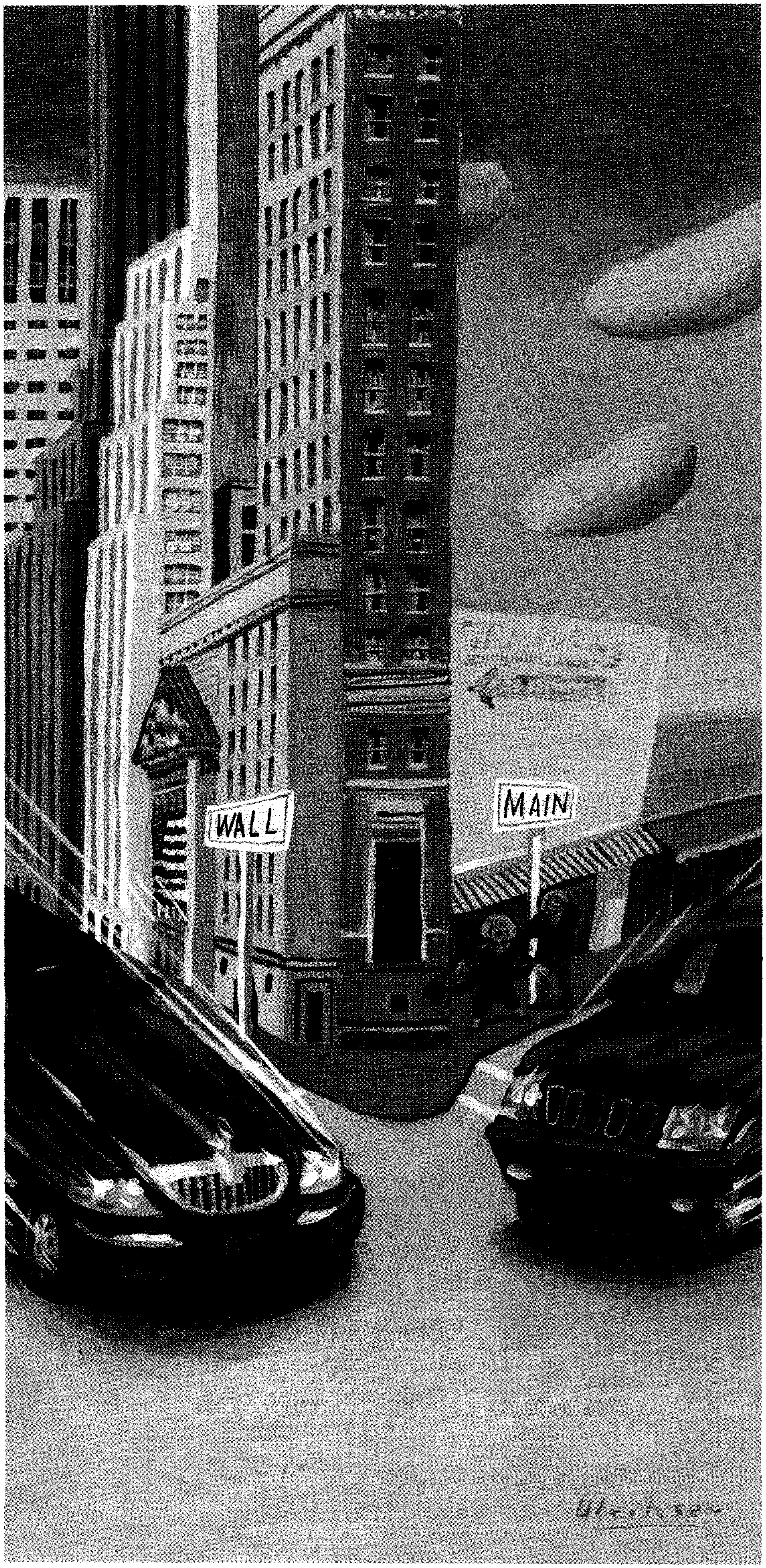
Tanya's bosom like a drawn bow
Holly like a load of flowers
Ann's gracious fruits
Masa brown and slimming down
from milky dark-veined weight
and, slighter than the rest,

But strongly dappled in the
sweltering-shady mind,
Edie's alabaster breasts.

Many of the volunteers—Holly and Tanya among them—decided to stay on San Juan Ridge. Some pooled their resources and bought the adjacent property, and this community became Snyder's testing ground for the ideas he was beginning to explore in print. In "Four Changes," a widely circulated environmental treatise he published in 1969 and made available for free, he warned of the dangers of overpopulation, pollution, and consumption—particularly of fossil fuels. Some of his ideas seem implausible now—polyandrous marriages as a remedy for overpopulation, walking the Coast Range as a way to get from San Francisco to L.A.—while others are straight out of the post-Gore environmental consciousness: bring your own bags to the grocery store, use natural fertilizer, recycle, carpool. He says, "It is not particularly gratifying to have been right."

"Gary was in the thick of Bay Area green activism at a time when it was being invented," Stewart Brand, the publisher of the "Whole Earth Catalogue" and one of many people who published "Four Changes," told me. According to Snyder's old friend Jack Shoemaker, of Counterpoint, his publisher since the early eighties, " 'Four Changes' really elevated him to be an environmental leader of the counterculture. It wasn't a hippie-dippy, feather-wearing poem. It was a manifesto, and the national environmental movement had to take it seriously." Snyder began to be recognized as a public intellectual, lecturing at universities and appearing at environmental conferences, including the historic United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, in 1972. Shoemaker said, "The environmental movement needed a celebrity-like person, someone charismatic. The others were dull as paste. They needed someone attractive, and Gary understood some-

SKETCHBOOK BY MARK ULRIKSEN



thing about his own attractiveness. He had a sense of his life as style, long before we had that term ‘life style.’ ”

Informed by the Buddhist principle of *ahimsa*, or non-harming, and also by Native American religious thought, Snyder argues that humans must take the nonhuman elements of the planet into account, not for our sakes but for theirs. Using Kitkitdizze as a prototype, he encourages others to inhabit more fully the places they live—settle down, get to know the neighbors (including, in his conception, the plants and animals), join the school board and the watershed council, and defend the local resources and way of life. Place, he writes, should be defined by natural indicators, like rivers and the flora and fauna they support. “The watershed is the first and last nation whose boundaries, though subtly shifting, are unarguable,” he wrote in an essay in the early nineties. “If public lands come under greater pressure to be opened for exploitation and use in the twenty-first century, it will be the local people, the watershed people, who will prove to be the last and possibly most effective line of defense.” Bill McKibben, writing in *The New York Review of Books* in 1991, asserted that “Snyder has emerged as perhaps the most eloquent American champion of what is called ‘bioregionalism,’ the idea that political boundaries should reflect the land we live on, and that decisions within those boundaries should respect that land.” He went on, “The long-held aesthetic arguments for a simpler life are suddenly being seen to coincide neatly with the hard-headed calculations of the atmospheric chemists. Snyder is among the first to sense this conjunction.” Snyder’s take on climate change is, however, typically independent. Humans may be in for some difficult times, but nature will take care of itself, he says. Accept impermanence.

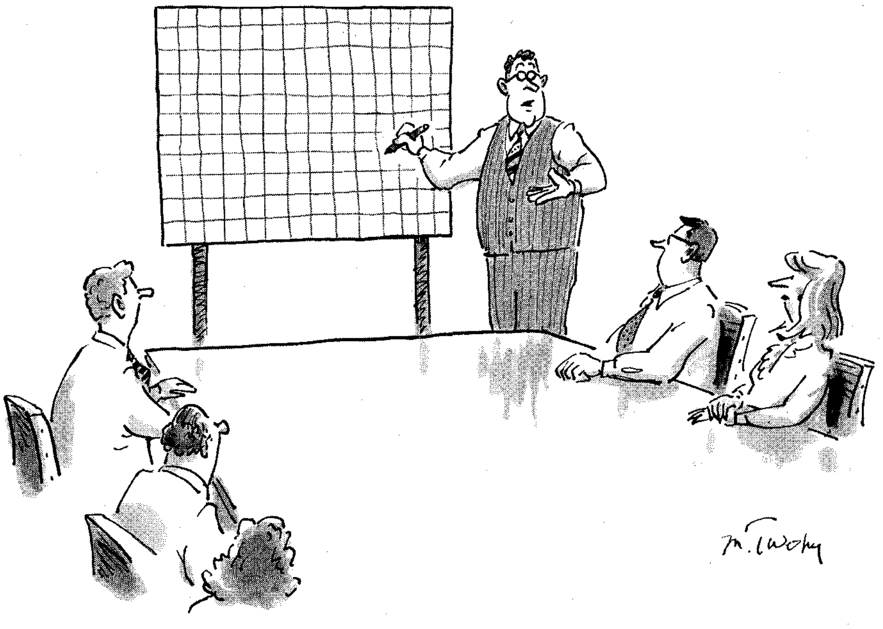
In the early days, Snyder and his family hand-pumped their water, and lived by kerosene and firelight. In summer, they cooked outside and ate in an open-sided dining room. Uehara made her first birthday cake, for Kai, in a Dutch oven, over campfire coals. And, readers of “Turtle Island” know, they all bathed together in a sauna, an everyday experience that, in “The Bath,” Snyder transforms into a meditation on the sexual interconnectedness of father, mother, and child. (When the boys were old enough to care, they banned him from reading the poem on the West Coast.)

Sweating and panting in the stove-steam hot-stone
cedar-planking wooden bucket water-splashing
kerosene lantern-flicker wind-in-the-pines-out
sierra forest ridges night—
Masa comes in, letting fresh cool air
sweep down from the door
a deep sweet breath
And she tips him over gripping neatly, one knee down
her hair falling hiding one whole side of shoulder, breast, and belly,
Washes deftly Kai’s head-hair
as he gets mad and yells—
The body of my lady, the winding valley spine,
the space between the thighs I reach through,
cup her curving vulva arch and hold it from behind,
a soapy tickle   a hand of grail
The gates of Awe
That open back a turning double-mirror world of
wombs in wombs, in rings,
that start in music,
is this our body?

The sauna still stands. Snyder told me that it can fit five or six comfortably, though it has sometimes held many more. Inside is a shelf of special objects—a piece of white brain coral, a perfectly round stone, and a little brass figurine of a man and a woman in *yabyum*. “But it’s much too hot in here to do anything like that,” he said. “You’d have a heart attack!”

Uehara and Snyder divorced in 1990; she is remarried, and lives on a piece of land next door. “Gary was so social—still is,” she told me. “Out of seven days, maybe five of them we had someone for dinner. A natural, organic poetry salon was constantly happening in our living room. Ferlinghetti came, Ginsberg came, McClure, Lew Welch”—a poet Snyder had known since Reed. “They were in and out all the time. Gary would invite the neighbors who were interested in their ideas. I was doing all the cooking, with two little kids in diapers.” Snyder, she said, did the dishes.

In addition to the welcome guests, there was a stream of uninvited and, according to Uehara, ill-mannered hippies, who would arrive expecting to be edified and fed. Joanne Kyger told me, “There were an awful lot of Gary Snyder wannabes. His style of writing was very appealing in the seventies to young men looking for a poetic identity. He was a good example of a greened-out, dropout way to live.” The world of Kitkitdizze also attracted a more sophisticated type of seeker and scenester. “Gary became one of those figures, one of those cultural touchstones,” Shoemaker said. Robert Crumb, the cartoonist, visited with his band, and played a gig at the North San Juan Volunteer Fire Department Hall. The actor and writer Peter Coyote, who was living on a commune in



“Any requests?”

West Marin with some of the Diggers, an anarchist group from Haight-Ashbury, met Snyder through Lew Welch and became a regular. "I began to study Gary," Coyote told me. "I looked carefully at his house, at the level of thought that went into it. It's so elegant, and has everything he needs without being expensive." Following Snyder's example, Coyote took up the practice of Zen. The only person I heard about who did not relish going to Kitkitdizze was James Laughlin, the founder of New Directions, who published Snyder from the sixties through the eighties. Laughlin, Lawrence Ferlinghetti told me, was "a total Ivy League gentleman," afraid to sit cross-legged on the floor in his wingtip cordovan shoes, much less take the shoes off, in compliance with the household's Japanese rules.

In the early eighties, when Snyder built Ring of Bone, a beautiful *zendo* in the meadow behind his house, Jerry Brown, then the governor of California, came to meditate, and one time brought Snyder a sculpture of Fudo—the ferocious, sword-bearing, lariat-swinging deity. ("He's a mountain figure," Snyder says. "A kind of tattered, workingman's Buddha. He's always been one of my allies.")

Brown visited Kitkitdizze occasionally in the seventies and eighties—it was just two hours from Sacramento—and appointed Snyder the first chairman of a new artist-run state arts commission. Brown liked the literary conversation—Snyder's easy, learned references to Chinese and Japanese poetry—and valued their discussions of Zen and ecology. He even bought a parcel of land near the ridge. "What I really appreciated particularly about Gary was his knowledge of the land—the flora and fauna and what it could be," Brown told me. "It was a perspective outside the hustle of political and business life. I like what he does. It's very concrete. He knows how to sharpen an axe, and all those things you don't learn in the city, or in school." Snyder's relationship with Brown represents the most classically Chinese moment in his career, and one that is extremely rare in America: the poet as a servant of the state. He got a few poems out of it, including one, collected in "Axe Handles" (1983), that describes how, after he and the Governor "spoke of farming, / of oil, and what would happen to the cars," he took out a bow and arrow, and they started shooting at straw bales near the barn.

"Look what you did."

One day, visiting Snyder at Kitkitdizze, I met a young man who was working in the garden, Matthew O'Malley, from Sandwich, Massachusetts. He had moved to the ridge two years before, drawn to the community that has grown up around Snyder. "There's a kind of lore about the reinhabitory culture there," he told me a few weeks later, off the ridge. "I wanted to see if I could become part of it." In college, at Villanova, he and his friends had a kind of philosophers' circle where they read Snyder's poems—"No one's teaching that stuff in the Northeast!"—sat in meditation, drank red wine, wrote, pondered the idea of blue-collar poetry, and went backpacking together. When he graduated, he went to work on a trail crew. "Gary's kind of an exemplar," he said. "It's not just the poems. A lot of it is how he's lived his life."

O'Malley has reddish-brown hair and a beard, wears little glasses, and keeps a notebook and a pencil tucked into the front pocket of a button-down shirt. His manner is serious; he is an elderly twenty-six. He said he was studying at Ring of Bone and living in a school bus on China Flats, just below Uehara's house. He had got solar panels but hadn't hooked them up. "I have kerosene and candles," he said—enough light to read and write poems by. "It works. So many people up there were on kerosene for years."

Driving, Snyder dictates poems into a little tape recorder, along with their punctuation—double indent, space, comma, point. To him, the written texts of poems are musical scores; on the page their forms are fluid, loose, irregular. Blocks of indented lines indicate a shift in voice, and often a slight conceptual change, as when, Snyder says, "You're telling two closely related stories." White space in the middle of the line is for a caesura more substantial than a comma or a semicolon; white space between stanzas allows time to elapse. "His reasons are never visual, but arranging the line as he does is a way of announcing, 'This is less regimented, more dance-like,' " Robert Hass, who won this year's Pulitzer Prize for poetry, said. "Letting the poem breathe is another way of putting it."

Snyder's rhythms are accentual; like Pound, he hears stresses rather than stresses and syllables, as metrical poets do. To describe his mode as lyric does not quite capture it. Even Snyder's most intimate poems can have an impersonal quality: the "I," sometimes suppressed, is unobtrusive—a vehicle for exploring the world, not a world in itself. Snyder sees his poems as "mytho-poetic, magical-lyrical-oral, in a line from Blake." Sea-

"Don't talk to me about suffering—in my spare time, I'm a writer."

• •

mus Heaney said, "Snyder is a poet of mind. The bare-handed encounter with the actual does not preclude a clear-headed vision of what's called for." The poems do feel instructional; the poet Brenda Hillman thinks of Snyder's body of work as a "Georgics." Reading him, you encounter a massive, assimilating intelligence, with a startling command of natural and human history. He possesses a scholar's exactitude, and occasionally a scholar's pedantry and attraction to the arcane fact—providing the Japanese translation of "boar meat" or positing the Finno-Ugric origins of the word "hemp." "It's a professorial thing to do," he says. "I realize that it's not going to be of use to a great number of people. However, it's part of the history of language, and it enriches how we understand language."

The poet Thom Gunn, in an admiring review of Snyder for the BBC's *The Listener,* remarked that the poems were "deceptively simple." Even an apparently obvious, diaristic poem like "Burning the Small Dead," from "The Back Country"—a volume, published in 1968, that prompted the *Partisan Review* to call Snyder's work "monotonous, flat and superficial"—is rich in information. The entire poem reads:

Burning the small dead
branches
broke from beneath
thick spreading
whitebark pine.

a hundred summers
snowmelt   rock   and air

hiss in a twisted bough.

sierra granite;
Mt. Ritter—
black rock twice as old.

Deneb, Altair

windy fire

The poem is an evocation of the expanse of geological time, and an exploration of the forces that shape the landscape. Its observations, so lightly offered, are accurate. Hass said, "Whitebark pine is a little scrubby pine that only appears at the tree line. If you know mountains, you know you're probably at ten thousand feet. He's picked off the dead branches and is making a fire, and he thinks about its life span. Then, thinking about things that burn, he says 'sierra granite'—granite is twice-burned rock, forged out of fire. Looking south from the gray granite of Yosemite, you see a chocolate-colored rock—'Mt. Ritter/black rock twice as old'—and it *is* twice as old. In summertime, you locate yourself by the summer triangle, two points of which are the stars Deneb and Altair. He goes from looking at the little fire he's made to thinking about fire that forged the granite, to the stars, and says what Buddhists say: everything is burning." I'd add that Vega, the third point in the summer triangle, is a star that, in Yosemite, appears to be directly overhead, making the "windy fire" its imaginative as well as its syntactic stand-in.

Although in recent years Snyder's prose has been discovered by the emerging discipline of eco-literature—Lawrence Buell, a professor at Harvard, is one prominent critic in the field who teaches him—Snyder says that there has been, about his poetry, "a lot of silence from some quarters" of the literary establishment. "There are people who just don't want to deal with it," he says. "More in the East than in the West. A certain percentage of my poetry requires for a scholar to become more acquainted with Native American and East Asian thinking. It is considered somewhat marginal to mainstream America. Fair enough. The poetics itself is a little marginal, too, in that I have consciously been more aware of the oral tradition than other poets." Another problem is that he is sometimes categorized as a nature poet—"the kiss of death, actually." He says, "Being called a nature poet is like being called a woman poet, as if it were a lower grade of writing, and one based in romanticism. I am a poet who has preferred not to distinguish in poetry between nature and humanity. Just like I would argue as a bioregionalist that all of these beings are part of my community, and I would like to be able to say hello to each of them." But Snyder does not stand completely outside the mainstream poetry world: he is a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, and this year won the Ruth Lilly prize from the Poetry Foundation, one of several prestigious awards he has received.

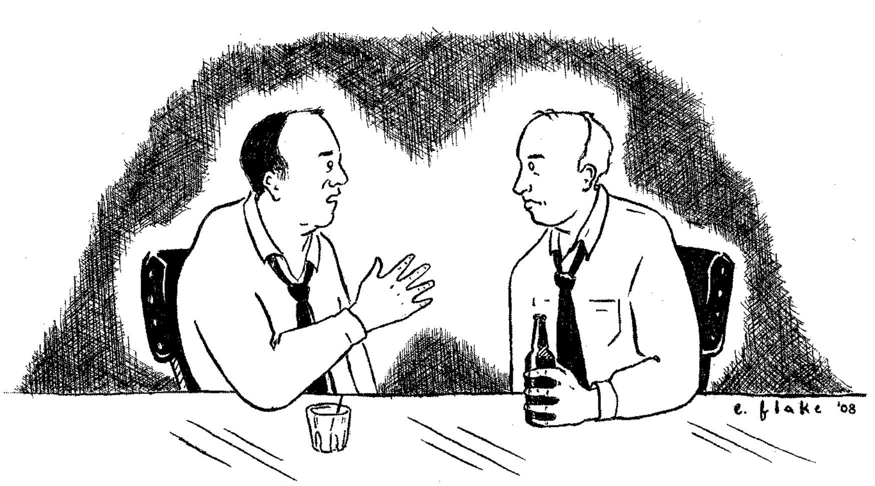
Snyder's most complex and difficult work is "Mountains and Rivers Without End," a poem cycle that absorbed him from 1956 until 1996, and whose title is taken from a category of Chinese landscape painting. "I've done a lot of short lyric poems and those are widely read, but my real challenge and what really interests me is the long narrative poem," he told me. "The burden of information and story it can carry is huge. These poems can be about a whole tribe or clan or world." The poem—which was published in 1997 and moves through terrains as varied as the Northwestern highway 99, New York City, and Kathmandu, invoking Buddhas, telling old folk stories, explaining geo-history, tracing rivers, meeting talking animals—is structured, to some extent, like a Noh play. "It follows *jo-ha-kyu*," Snyder said. "*Jo* means 'serene introduction.' *Ha* means 'extended and detailed narrative information.' *Kyu* means 'an ending which is surprisingly sudden.' It's much more interesting than the Aristotelian model of a beginning, middle, and end. The Japanese say, 'Listen to the birdsong, it has a *jo*, a *ha*, and a *kyu*.' To them it's completely natural."

"Mountains and Rivers" is Snyder's most sustained effort at representing a bioregional world view. In an accompanying "making of" essay, he writes that the poem began to take shape when he arrived in Japan for the first time. "In Kyoto I lived in the Rinzai Zen temple compound of Shokoku-ji. I immediately entered the local hilly forests, found the trails and shrines, and paid my respects to the local *kami*. In my small spare time I read geology and geomorphology. I came to see the yogic implications of 'mountains' and 'rivers' as the play between the tough spirit of willed self-discipline and the generous and loving spirit of concern for all beings." He continues, "I could imagine this dyad as paralleled in the dynamics of mountain uplift, subduction, erosion, and the planetary water cycle." The poem's journey ends in the Black Rock desert of northwestern Nevada, a place beyond the project's terms: "no waters, no mountains, no/bush no grass and/because no grass/no shade but your shadow./No flatness because no not-flatness./No loss, no gain. So—/nothing in the way!/—the ground is the sky/the sky is the ground,/no place between." The final image is of a *sumi* paintbrush, lifting off the page.

The first weekend in August, Snyder was in the High Sierra of Yosemite, giving readings at Parsons Lodge, a one-room structure of granite porphyry and lodgepole beams designed by the Arts and Crafts architects Bernard Maybeck and Mark White for the Sierra Club, in 1915. The lodge was half a mile from the road, across a bright meadow studded with glacial erratics and tall lodgepole pines and pale-green sagebrush, through which the Tuolumne River ran. Snyder, in a crisp white shirt and hiking boots, and wearing a red backpack, set out across the meadow in the evening, as the light was growing cold and golden and the lodgepoles were beginning to cast long shadows. He knew the terrain well. Tuolumne Meadows, as the area is known, was the point from which his trail crew set out, in 1955, and he has been back, camping and hiking and climbing—researching—many times. "This is another sort of home, this country is," he said.

More than three hundred people crowded in the large arched doorway of the lodge and leaned through the open French windows—the young and scruffy, the rangers in their uniforms, the old-timers in Tevas with braided hair. Two Park Service poets—Guy McClellan, just graduated from Lewis and Clark, and Nick Ross-Rhudy, still at Reed—sat on a ledge under a window, elbows on knees. They were both aficionados of "Riprap." Ross-Rhudy—tall and gangly with soft blue eyes and a conch pierce in his ear—was on a trail crew for the summer. "Something I really appreciate is that the language is our everyday language," he said later. "He talks about things like the singlejack and pack strings—as a poet, those words just sound good. Doing trail-crew work, you love those words and what they represent."

Snyder opened by reading "Off the Trail," an easygoing love poem celebrating spontaneity, independence, and companionability. He dedicated it to his late wife, Carole Koda, a Japanese-American woman he married in the early nineties and who died two years ago. After the poem, he offered a short lesson on its moral, drawn from anthropology. "Throughout human history and prehistory, the trail was only to get you somewhere," he said. "What was important was what was off the trail. Food, roots, berries, dye plants, glue plants, poisonous plants, recreational-drug plants, squirrel nests, bird nests, everything you might think you'd need. What's way off the trail are the places you go to be alone and have a vision and your own spiritual trip, maybe with some of those recreational plants"—knowing snickers from the kids—"and then you come back." For the rest of the night, he read from "Mountains and Rivers." In response to a comment from the audience about the Heart Sutra, he recited it. Afterward, he retraced his steps across the meadow in the dark, stopping every few minutes to look up: Scorpio, with Antares, the fire star, burning orange; the polestar, which in ancient China was a symbol of the emperor; Vega, in the center of the sky. ♦



"I'm saying, why buy the cow when I can continue to just buy the milk?"

FICTION

SLEEP

BY RODDY DOYLE

It was the thing he'd always loved about her. The way she could sleep. When they'd just started going with each other, before they really knew each other, he'd lie awake, hoping she'd wake up, praying for it, dying. But even then he'd loved to look at her while she slept. There was something about it that made him feel lucky, or privileged. Or trusted. She could do that beside him, turn everything off, all the defenses, and let him watch her.

It wasn't just the drink that knocked Tara out. They drank a lot in the early days. They'd get drunk and braver two nights a week, Fridays and Saturdays. There'd be a taxi or the last bus home, to his flat or hers. Hers was nicer. Tom's flat was a kip, and the bed sagged badly in the middle. They'd paw at each other in the taxi. There was once, a mad night, she took the belt off his trousers, and put it around her neck and pulled. The driver swerved off the road, up onto the path, and stopped.

—Out.

—Ah, come on, she said. She gave him her accent and smile. We were joking.

—Out, the driver said to the mirror. Now, or I'll drive yis to the cop shop. It's only around the corner.

Her flat was around the corner, too, so they paid the driver and walked the rest of the way. Holding each other, trying to walk side by side. The belt wasn't around her neck and it wasn't around his waist.

—We left it in the fucking taxi.

She pronounced her "g"s. All of them. She was the only person he knew who did that. It still made him weak. Even when she was telling him he was fucking useless. There was one night—it might have been the same night; there were a lot of new, weird nights then—she fell asleep on Friday and woke up on Sunday morning. He was awake on Saturday, as usual. Alert, alive, gasping for water and sex, but content enough with the water. He got out of the bed and went to the kitchen. She had a kitchen, and a jacks. He didn't, not then. His flat was just the one room, and it wasn't big. He had a bed, a table, two chairs, a Baby Belling cooker, and a fridge so small it could only take a salad-cream bottle if he sat it on its side. He shared the toilet and bath with three other bed-sits, which was fine sometimes and fuckin' desperate other times.

JARED JOSLIN, "SLEEPING REDHEAD" (2004)/YARGER | STRAUSS CONTEMPORARY

He went to the kitchen and let the cold tap run. He could remember water bouncing off the bottom of the sink onto his stomach and chest. He couldn't find a glass, so he'd used a mug with blue and white stripes and tea stains inside it. He'd filled it twice and knocked it back. Then he'd filled the mug again and brought it back to the bedroom. He'd got under the duvet, hoping his movements would wake her. He'd yawned, extravagantly—he remembered this. Stretched, extravagantly. His knuckles scraped the wall behind him. The water sloshed around inside him—he felt it, he heard it—then settled.

She wasn't going to wake up. He'd accepted that, and he'd read for a while. "A Tale of Two Cities." He'd dozed off. He'd read some more—he'd finished the book that day. He'd gone out to the shop and bought rashers and bread, and the Irish *Times* and a packet of Ritchie's Silvermints. He'd made himself a rasher sandwich. He'd left the kitchen door open and the window shut, and hoped the smell would wake her—she loved her grub. But it didn't. He took the rashers back to the bed and ate them while he read the paper. Every bit of it. Even the deaths and births and "Presbyterian Notes." And dozed, and woke and stretched—extravagantly. He got up and went to the jacks and came back, and watched her sleep. It got dark outside, and he put on his clothes and went for a pint in the pub at the top of her road. It was a middle-class place, full of people who looked as if they disapproved of pubs. He was the only man in the place drinking Guinness. This was back in the early eighties, so it was weird. But he'd loved her for that, too—the feeling that she was bringing him into a new world. He went back to the flat and stopped for chips on the way. The chipper was posh, too: scampi on the menu on the wall behind the counter. He didn't really know what scampi was. He bought himself chips and a spice burger. He had her keys with him. He let himself in and slammed the door, slightly. He brought the portable telly to the bedroom, got undressed and back under the duvet, and ate the chips and watched "Match of the Day" and a film he couldn't remember now. He turned off the telly and stretched and yawned, and started another book. "Crime and Punishment." Off her bookshelf.

She woke the next morning and knew it was Sunday. Twenty-six years later, it still amazed him. He often boasted about it. He didn't sleep much himself, but he'd married a woman who did. He loved that. It had always been good. He still looked at her while she slept. She was still beautiful.

He'd been a different kind of eejit back then. He never went to restaurants, because they were bourgeois. He remembered actually saying that. There was Bewley's, on Westmoreland Street, where you could get a fry or shepherd's pie—the people's food. Where you queued up and carried your own tray. Where they didn't throw out the junkies. That was the only place he'd go to. Not that he'd wanted to eat with the junkies. He kept well away from them. But he liked the fact that they could go into Bewley's, sit down and stay as long as they wanted. There was room for them. And the old women with their cakes and pots of tea, and journalists from the Irish *Times* across the street, and people who'd missed their bus and came in to get out of the rain. The famous Bewley's coffee was dreadful, but he only found that out later, when real coffee came to Dublin. And even if he'd known, it wouldn't have mattered. Good coffee would have been bourgeois. Along with suits and new cars and flats with more than two rooms and classical music and all the other things he couldn't cope with.

Then she phoned him one night. The strange man from the flat beside the pay phone in the hall shouted up the stairs. Tom went down and picked up the phone.

—Hi.

It was her.

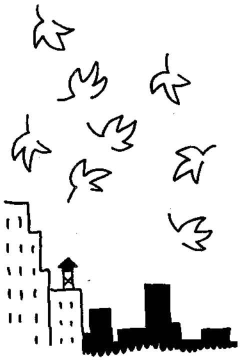
—Hi.

It was Tuesday. Nine o'clock. He'd been watching the news.

—I'm still in town, she said. Working late. Will we go for something to eat?

And he'd said yes. He was twenty minutes from her and he ran part of the way. He met her outside the Lebanese restaurant he'd walked past every day for years. They went in, and down the wooden steps to the basement. They ate in the damp, and he loved it. Not the food. Food never grabbed him. Not then or since. He liked food, but it was good or great—that was it. It was never delicious or sublime. He was a writer, but he'd never written about food. There wasn't a banana or a biscuit in anything he'd done.

It was her eating the food and talking about it—that was what he'd loved. Stuffing her mouth, laughing. A fat belly dancer came out of the ladies' with a tape recorder and an anorak. She plugged it in, hit the button, climbed out of the anorak, and danced in the couple of inches that were left between the tables. She knocked over the salt on theirs. They were the only customers. He couldn't wait to clap.



They went back to his place, because he needed his bag for work in the morning. They lay on his bed, pushed against each other because of the dead springs beneath them, and listened to the drunk in the next room trying to open a tin of stew or dog food.

—You don't have to live here, she said, quietly.

—It's fine.

—It isn't, she said. It's fucking awful. Move in with me.

She slept and he looked at her. He slept for a while. She was still asleep when he had to leave for work. He sat on the chair beside the bed. He missed his bus.

He was a teacher then. He'd loved college, U.C.D., from the first day, and decided he'd stay. He saw himself lecturing on the contemporary novel to a room full of twenty-year-old women. He'd ended up teaching seven-year-old boys how to button their coats and say their prayers in Irish. But he liked it. For five years. Great kids—wild kids. With wild parents. Some of the mothers had frightened him. Tough, sexy birds in shiny tracksuits. A bit desperate and mad; the sexy days were numbered, and they knew it. He'd gone for a drink after work once, with a few of the other staff. He was at the bar, waiting for his pint—and one of the mothers was right beside him.

—Happy Christmas, sir, she said.

And she kissed him—on October the 23rd. She grabbed his jacket and her tongue went into his mouth. He tasted Coke and cheese 'n' onion. She took her mouth away, but she held on to his jacket.

—There, she said.

She smiled.

Her husband had come with her to the last parent-teacher meeting. He'd given Tom permission to use corporal punishment on their son.

—You can batter the little cunt, he'd said. Anytime.

An angry unemployed man who'd have been just as angry if he'd had a job.

But Tom, in the pub, didn't panic. He didn't look around for the husband. He didn't pull his jacket from her grip. If she'd asked him did he want to go outside and ride her against the back wall, behind the crates of empties, he'd have gone with her. It was politics, saying yes to a working-class woman with an unemployed husband. But she didn't ask. She let go of his jacket and went back to her friends, more blond mothers in tracksuits, who cheered as she got nearer to them. It was then that he'd decided to get out of teaching.

But he'd liked it. And he'd believed in it. Teaching the little sons of men and women who'd never known work. Giving them that bit of power. But he'd very few fond memories.

Teaching was how he'd met Tara. He didn't remember much about the job, but writing about it had given him his route out. He wrote a weekly column for a magazine called *Holy Dublin*. He'd started as a kind of Marxist man-about-town, but he'd run out of things to write about, because Dublin was such a dreary kip and he hardly ever went out. So he began to write about teaching. Most of it was lies—he didn't use his own name. "Notes from the Chalkface," by Paddy Orwell. He even made himself a secondary teacher, teaching much older kids in a coed school. He met Tara one day when he brought in his copy.

He heard her before he saw her.

—Where's the fucking stapler?

That "g." He opened the reception door. She was searching the desk drawer with a cheerful violence that he thought was lovely. She looked at him. Big eyes, mouth, small ears, the hair.

—Hello, she said.

—Hi, he said. I have my . . . my column here.

—Oh, great. Which one are you?

—"Notes from the Chalkface."

—I love that fucking thing, she said. It's a fucking hoot.

He took the pages from his schoolbag.

—Paddy Orwell, she said.

—It's not my real name.

—I love that, she said. That's so fucking cool.

—Thanks.

—I'm new, she said.

He gave up teaching a month later. He told her about the mother kissing him in the pub—she loved it. It was a weird thing to be doing in Ireland in the eighties, giving up a job. But the guilt was alleviated by the fact that he no longer had a job to give up. He was half unemployed, one of the people. And he could stay in bed with Tara. It was probably the last exciting, unpredictable thing he ever did.

Now, more than twenty-five years later, he was sitting in bed, watching her sleep. His back hurt, he was frightened, but she was exactly the same. She was a grandmother, but the same. She'd slept through the recession, the boom, and she was sleeping through the new recession. She'd slept through the anxieties, terrors, poisonings, the joys and shite of marriage and children. He had cancer of the colon—he'd found out that afternoon and he hadn't told her yet—but for now he didn't care. He had the cancer, she didn't—and that felt like success. It wasn't sentimentality. It was a physical thing, like a soft hand on the back of his neck.

He wouldn't die—he wasn't going to die. There was a good chance he wouldn't die, the specialist had said.

There was once—their eldest child stopped breathing. He came downstairs, out of bed, and sat between them on the couch. They argued over Aaron's head about who was going to bring him back upstairs. They were both a bit pissed—they were on three or four bottles of wine a night back then.

—I did it last time.

—You didn't. You weren't even here the last time.

Nothing too angry or meant. But they didn't notice that the child was dying until she gave up on the row and went to pick him up. Then they were suddenly sober and brilliant. He ran to the kitchen and rang for an ambulance. She managed to get some breath into Aaron, by massaging his chest or something, and she was putting on his coat—he was even helping her, lifting his arms. There was no sign of the ambulance, so Tom rang for a taxi. He told them it was an emergency, and there was one outside the front gate in thirty seconds—it seemed that quick. He ran out with Aaron in his arms, bouncing on his shoulder. The house wasn’t far from the children’s hospital on Temple Street, so he was there in five minutes, getting out of the taxi, trying to make sure Aaron’s head didn’t whack the door. The taxi-driver wouldn’t take money. The hospital would, though. They wanted a tenner before they’d let him into the A.&E. He remembered switching Aaron to his other shoulder so he could get at his wallet. He even remembered giving the woman behind the hatch two fivers and watching her write the receipt. Aaron was sitting in the crook of his arm, wheezing but O.K.

—Good lad, good lad.

It was asthma. A nurse saw that before a doctor had looked at him. She put him up on a bed and got him to sit back against the pillow, and started to put some sort of plastic mask over his nose and mouth.

—Look at this yoke, Aaron, she said. Will you put it on yourself or will I do it?

—What is it? Tom asked.

—A nebulizer, she said. It’ll open the poor lungs for him. It’s just a spray, really, with the medicine in it. The easiest way to get it into them. And they love the drama.

She smiled, and he smiled. He saw how it worked now, the clear plastic pipe running from a box in the wall to the mask. Aaron didn’t object as she put it over his face.

—Good lad, Tom said. You’re great.

He found a spare chair and sat beside Aaron. The place was packed. There wasn’t an empty bed, and some of the children were lying across two or three chairs, depending on the length of the child. Most of them had nebulizers. All the hissing and wheezing, the white-blue skin, the strange calm—it was terrifying, and lovely. The courage of his own lad, and the other children. A broken leg or a burn victim would have ruined it. He was there for three hours, more.

Later, he sat on the steps outside the hospital with Aaron, waiting for a taxi. Four in the morning. Aaron was wide awake, deep inside his coat. It was freezing, and absolutely windless. Tom could feel the dirt in the fog. There were men, four of them, standing at the corner of Hardwicke Street. They had a fire going in a barrel—a brazier. They stood around it, in jackets that looked much too thin.

—Why have they a fire? Aaron asked.

His breathing was grand, not a bother on him.

—They’re cold, Tom said.

—Why don’t they go to their houses?

—They want to stop other men from selling drugs, Tom said. It’s why they’re out so late. Concerned Parents, they’re called. It’s sad.

They said nothing else. They sat close and watched the men and the fire in the barrel and waited for the taxi.

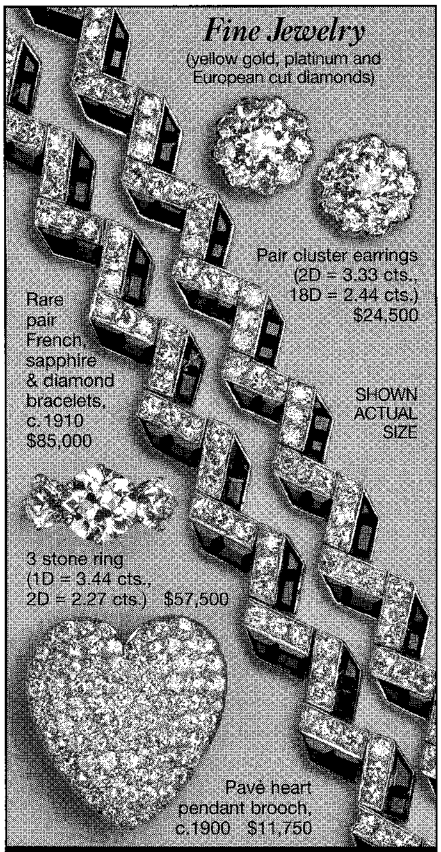
She was awake when they got home. Lying in bed, well under the duvet. She lifted it so Aaron could get in beside her.

—Asthma, Tom said.

She smiled, and kissed Aaron’s forehead.

Tom got into the bed. He leaned across Aaron, touched the top of her head. She smiled. She closed her eyes. She opened them and closed them again. He lay there. She was asleep again. He listened to her, and to Aaron. He’d get a book tomorrow. He’d read it—they’d read it—and know what they needed to know about asthma. About bronchospasm and allergens. About the inhalers and dust mites and mattress and pillow covers. They’d get rid of the carpets and the curtains, get blinds instead, and polish the floorboards. They’d sign petitions and phone the local politicians to make Dublin a smokeless zone. Aaron would be fine. He’d get into fights, he’d play his football. He’d go drinking in St. Anne’s Park, in the pissing rain, with his inhaler in his pocket. He’d join a band, he’d smoke, he’d stroll up Kilimanjaro. He’d come home one morning and tell them they were going to be grandparents, and make them both shockingly happy.

Tom sat up a bit straighter now, in the bed. He looked at her, sleeping. ♦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THE CRITICS

A CRITIC AT LARGE

BOUND FOR GLORY

Writing campaign lives.

BY JILL LEPORE

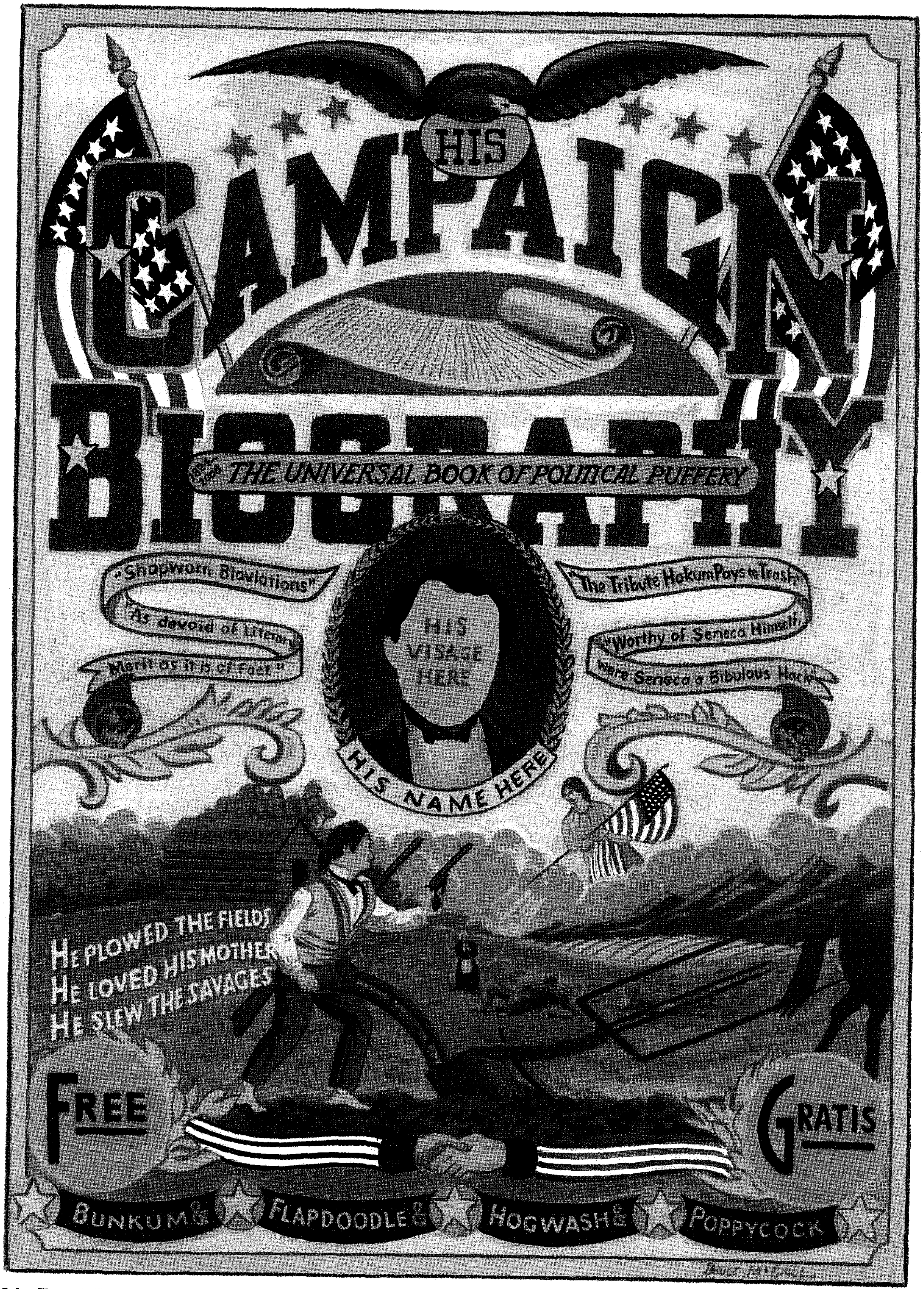
Biographers of Andrew Jackson used to be cursed. On January 8, 1815, the General led American forces in a stunning defeat of an invading British Army, winning the Battle of New Orleans at the end of the War of 1812. With a political career in mind, he cast about for a biographer to chronicle his exploits. He settled on David Ramsay, a sixty-six-year-old South Carolina legislator and physician and gifted historian whose books included a "Life of George Washington," published in 1807. But, before Ramsay had a chance to begin, he was shot in the back, three times, by a mad tailor on the streets of Charleston. (Ramsay had earlier ventured a medical opinion that the tailor was dangerously insane and, on his deathbed, he insisted that his assailant could not be held accountable for his actions.) Jackson next turned to his aide-de-camp John Reid, a man half Ramsay's age, and very much in Jackson's thrall. Reid went to work until, one day in January of 1816, he took suddenly and strangely ill. He died eighteen hours later. Before his demise, he had drafted only the first four chapters of the General's life; he hadn't got much farther than the Battle of Enotachopco, in 1814. (In which, to be sure, Jackson's merits were much extolled: only twenty of his own men were lost, but a hundred and eighty-nine Indians lay dead on the battlefield, and many more died afterward, for, as Reid put it, "the greatest slaughter was in the pursuit.")

His choices narrowing, Jackson then tapped as his biographer a twenty-six-year-old lawyer named John Eaton, who had served under him during the War of 1812 and was married to Jackson's ward. Like Reid, Eaton had never written a book. At the Hermitage, Jackson's thousand-acre cotton plantation outside Nashville, Eaton pored over Jackson's papers and wrote seven more chapters. The biography was published in 1817 as "The Life of Andrew Jackson." The next year, Eaton was rewarded with an appointment to a vacant seat in the United States Senate. In 1823, Jackson was elected as the other senator from Tennessee, and followed his biographer and friend to the nation's capital. The two men took lodgings at the same Washington boarding house. The following year, Jackson was a candidate for the Presidency. Eaton headed his campaign. Jackson's opponent John Quincy Adams refused to campaign at all. In keeping with the tradition of the first five American Presidents, Adams considered currying favor with voters to be beneath the dignity of the office, and believed that any man who craved the Presidency ought not to have it. Adams called this his Macbeth policy: "If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me, / Without my stir." Jackson's supporters leaned more toward Lady Macbeth's point of view. They had no choice but to stir: their candidate was, otherwise, unelectable. How they stirred has shaped American politics ever since. They told a story, the story of Andrew Jackson's life. In 1824, Eaton published a revised "Life of Jackson," founding a genre, the campaign biography. At its heart lies a single, telling anecdote. In 1781, when Jackson was fourteen and fighting in the American Revolution, he was captured. A British officer, whose boots had got muddy, ordered the boy to clean them: Jackson refused, and the officer beat him, badly, with a sword. All his life, he bore the scars. Andrew Jackson would not kneel before a tyrant.

Since 1824, no Presidential election year has passed without a campaign biography, printed about the time a candidate is nominated, chiefly for the purpose of getting him elected. (Although, since Reagan's "A New Beginning," in 1984, the campaign biography, as book, has been supplanted somewhat by the campaign film, screened at the nominating Convention.) The United States has had some very fine Presidents, and some not so fine. But their campaign biographies are much of a muchness. The worst of them read like an Election Edition Mad Libs, and even the best of them tell, with rare exception, the same Jacksonian story: scrappy maverick who splits rails and farms peanuts and shoots moose battles from the log cabin to the White House by dint of grit, smarts, stubbornness, and love of country. From Eaton's Jackson, it's more or less a straight line, right through Harrison, Garfield, Eisenhower, Reagan, and Clinton, all the way to Kaylene Johnson's "Sarah: How a Hockey Mom Turned the Political Establishment Upside Down" (Epicenter/Tyndale; $15.95). Jackson wouldn't polish those boots. Nixon learned how to be a good Vice-President by warming the bench during college football games. Palin forged bipartisan political alliances in step-aerobics class. Parties rise and fall. Wars begin and end. The world turns. But American campaign biographies still follow a script written nearly two centuries ago. East of piffle and west of hokum, the Boy from Hope always grows up to be the Man of the People. Will we ever stop electing Andrew Jackson?

As a Presidential candidate, Andrew Jackson was, at the start, a hard sell. The nation's first five Presidents—Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe—were diplomats, statesmen, philosophers. It was difficult to imagine how any man could fill the

ABOVE: MARISCAL; OPPOSITE: BRUCE MCCALL


HIS
CAMPAIGN
BIOGRAPHY
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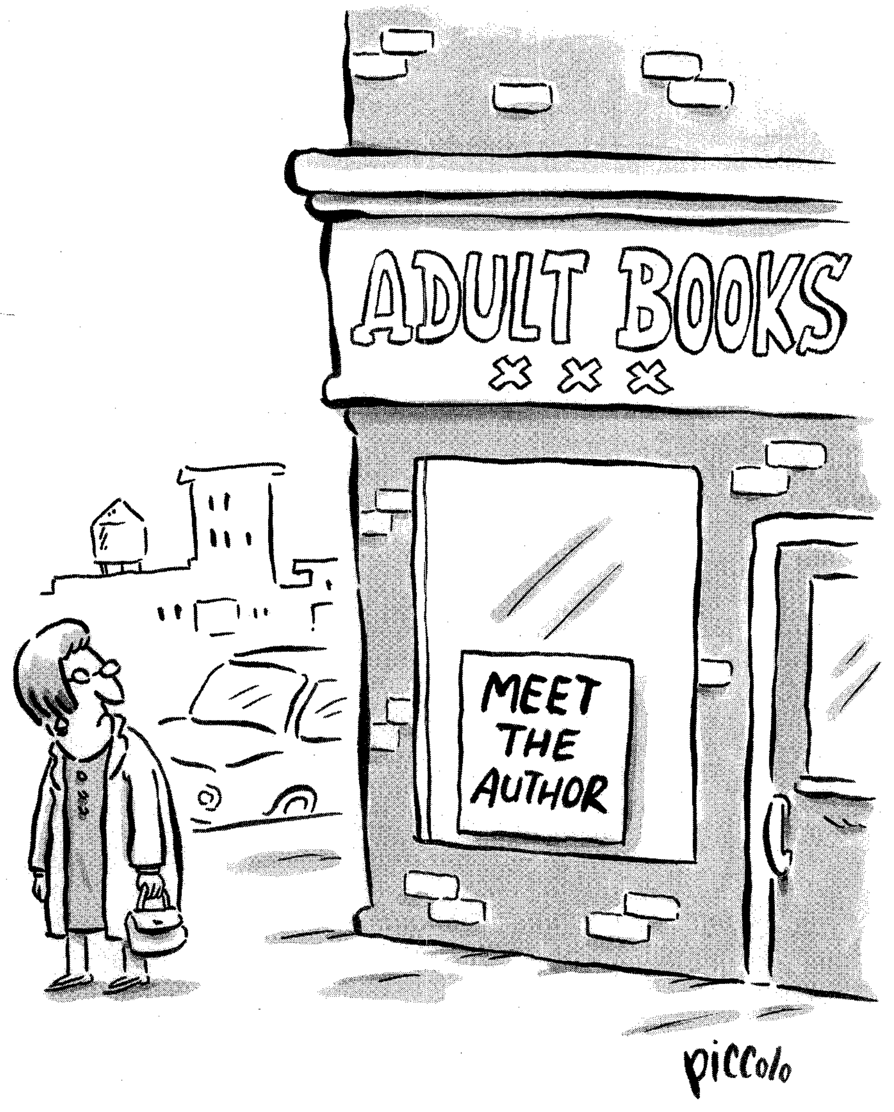
"Shopworn Bloviations"
"As devoid of Literary Merit as it is of Fact"
"The Tribute Hokum Pays to Trash"
"Worthy of Seneca Himself, were Seneca a Bibulous Hack"
HIS VISAGE HERE
HIS NAME HERE
HE PLOWED THE FIELDS
HE LOVED HIS MOTHER
HE SLEW THE SAVAGES
FREE
GRATIS
BUNKUM &
FLAPDOODLE &
HOGWASH &
POPPYCOCK

John Eaton's "Life of Jackson" established the genre of the campaign biography; almost every one published since varies only in detail.

shoes of the Founding Fathers. A generation had passed. John Quincy Adams, the son of the second President, seemed the most suitable prospect; a former Harvard professor of rhetoric and a U.S. senator, he spoke seven languages and had served as ambassador to the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, and Britain. As Secretary of State, he had drafted the Monroe Doctrine. But Andrew Jackson? He was provincial, and poorly educated. (The man spelled "government" with only one "n," John Quincy Adams once sneered.) Jefferson declared of Jackson's bid for the Presidency, "He is one of the most unfit men I know of for such a place." Granted, the Hero of New Orleans was wildly popular with the American people, but then so were gin and mountebanks. Jefferson regarded Jackson as no more than a military man who, for all his extraordinary valor, had a reputation as a despot: brutal, tempestuous, and vengeful. The Army needed men like Andrew Jackson. Whether the Presidency needed him was another matter. Even the General is reported to have said, "I know what I am fit for. I can command a body of men in a rough way, but I am not fit to be President."

The election of 1824 brought the first campaign buttons, the first public-opinion polls (undertaken by and published in pro-Jackson newspapers), and the first campaign biographies. Eaton's "Life of Jackson" was the one that established the genre's enduring conventions. When Eaton revised it in 1824, he turned what was a history, if a decidedly partial one, into political propaganda; his changes are carefully annotated by Frank Owsley, Jr., in a facsimile edition published by the University of Alabama Press. Eaton cut out or waved away everything compromising (the duels Jackson fought, a soldier he had executed), lingered longer over everything wondrous (battles, mainly), and converted into strengths what pundits had construed as weaknesses. Eaton's Jackson wasn't reckless; he was fearless. He had almost no political experience; he was, therefore, ideally suited to fight corruption. He lacked political pedigree; his father, a poor Scotch-Irish immigrant, died before he was born—but this only made Jackson more qualified for the White House, since he was, to use a phrase that was coined during his Presidency, a "self-made man."



In 1824, with Eaton's biography behind him, Jackson won both the popular vote and a plurality, though not a majority, of the electoral vote. The election was thrown to the House, which chose Adams. Furious, Jackson returned to the Hermitage, vowing revenge. Eaton began still further revisions to his "Life of Jackson." Meanwhile, editions were printed in Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and even in Boston, where the book was spuriously attributed to "a citizen of Massachusetts."

When Jackson trounced Adams in the Presidential election of 1828, he rewarded his Boswell by naming him Secretary of War. This alarmed Washington possibly even more than the rest of Jackson's spoils-system appointments, because Eaton had, just before Jackson's Inauguration, married a widow of dubious repute. The scandal of Eaton's marriage dominated Jackson's first two years in office. In a Cabinet meeting in 1829, the President vouched for Mrs. Eaton's virtue: "She is as chaste as a virgin!" Only Jackson's Secretary of State, Martin Van Buren, called upon the Eatons socially, a maneuver believed by many to have insured his place as Jackson's successor. (As James Parton put it in his best-selling "Life of Jackson," from 1859, "The political history of the United States for the last thirty years dates from the moment when the soft hand of Mr. Van Buren touched Mrs. Eaton's knocker.") What came to be called the Petticoat War led to much lampooning—one cartoon pictured Jackson, at a washtub, scrubbing a petticoat, complaining, "The more I rub this, the worst it looks"—but it got a whole lot less funny after it led to the dissolution, in 1831, of his entire Cabinet.

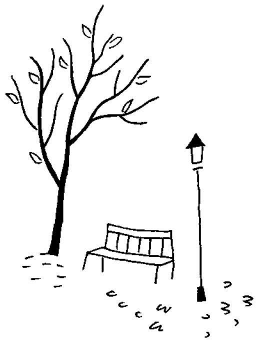
Jackson's stormy and controversial Administration is the subject of Jon Meacham's engrossing and admiring "American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House," which Random House will publish next month. Jackson retired the national debt. He killed the Bank of the United States. He made free use of the pocket veto. When the Supreme Court ruled against his plan to force the Cherokee to move to lands west of the Mississippi, Jackson went ahead anyway. Meacham thinks that most of what Jackson did was good for the country, a conclusion helped by the fact that he pretty much ends his story the day Jackson left office, instead of, say, nine weeks later, when the nation's financial system collapsed. (In a brief aside, Meacham attributes the Panic of 1837 to the growing complexity of the economy.) By any measure, Andrew Jackson vastly expanded the powers of the President. What he could not do was protect John Eaton, the man who had scrubbed clean his own reputation. In 1831, Eaton and his wife were banished from Washington. A curse, when it hits, hits hard.

In the eighteen-fifties, when James Parton began the research for his book about Jackson, he found, in the nation's libraries and bookstores, "mountains of lies and trash" known as " 'Campaign literature,' a peculiar product of the United States." Measured against the puffery that came after it, Parton thought, Eaton's campaign biography was a model of restraint. Still, Eaton's "Life," along with Jackson's Presidency, rewrote the Presidential job description. When Henry Clay ran against Jackson in 1832, his biographer was left to apologize for Clay's experience:

> Much as we admire Henry Clay the Orator, Henry Clay the Statesman, Henry Clay the distinguished and commanding Speaker of the House of Representatives, Henry Clay the Minister Plenipotentiary, Henry Clay the Secretary of State, Henry Clay the grave and able Senator, Henry Clay the favorite of the people, yet do we love far more to dwell upon "the orphan-boy" following the plough in the slashes of Hanover, and occasionally trudging his way, with a grist of corn, to a distant mill, to provide bread for a widowed mother and younger brothers and sisters.

The Incumbent beat the Orphan in a landslide.

In 1834, Davy Crockett wrote the first Presidential campaign autobiography. Vying for the Whig nomination, he then wrote an ornery biography of his rival, upbraiding him for having traded his coonskin cap for a swankier hat. "Mr. Van Buren's parents were humble, plain, and not much troubled with book knowledge, and so were mine," Crockett allowed. But Van Buren had since put on airs: "He couldn't bear his rise; I never minded mine." In 1839, William Henry Harrison's biographer, in a book called "The People's Presidential Candidate," tried both to nod to Tippecanoe's founding forebears (his father, a staggeringly wealthy Virginia slave owner, had signed the Declaration of Independence) and to insist that he was nevertheless no more than an ordinary farmer who had "never been rich" and lived quietly among his crops and cows "upon his farm at North Bend, on the Ohio." Harrison, who was sixty-seven, and fighting rumors of senility, had distinguished himself in war. If he were elected, one of his supporters observed, it would be "on account of the past, not the future. Let him then rely entirely on the past. Let him say not one single word about his principles, or his creed—let him say nothing—promise nothing." Harrison obliged, earning the nickname General Mum. When the editor of a Democratic newspaper joked that "Old Granny" Harrison could be persuaded to turn down the nomination and "sit the remainder of his days in his log cabin" if he were treated to a pension and "a barrel of hard cider," Whigs turned this on its head, dubbing Harrison—who lived in a mansion—the Log Cabin Candidate. Whigs built log cabins on wheels, hitched them to horses, and drove them across the country, handing out mugs of hard cider along the way. They built campaign headquarters out of logs. A Philadelphia distiller, E. C. Booz, sold *whiskey in bottles shaped like log cabins*. One Albany newspaper, attempting to expose the chicanery behind calling an aristocrat a mountain man, printed a glossary:



> Patriotism.—Guzzling sour cider.
> Calumny.—The truth.
> Argument.—Hurrah for Old Tip.
> Personal Abuse.—Telling facts.
> Log Cabin.—A palace.

Harrison died, of pneumonia, a month after his Inauguration (which is why his successor, John Tyler, came to be called His Accidency), but the log cabin proved long-lived. "It did not happen to me to be born in a log cabin," Daniel Webster, a three-time Presidential aspirant, lamented, adding, "but my elder brothers and sisters were." (As the literary scholar James D. Hart once observed, "Webster, a politician with older siblings, a mother who was not widowed, and a birthplace not built of logs, obviously sensed that his career could not extend beyond the Senate.")

"Political biography," the *Democratic Review* reported, mid-century, "has, for many years, consisted of the vilest fanfaronade and farrago." During the election of 1848, frontier, log-cabin Jacksonianism had become so crucial to Presidential campaigning that a critic of the Whig nominee, Zachary Taylor, charged that his only qualification for office was "sleeping forty years in the woods and cultivating moss on the calves of his legs." (Jackson had run as the "Farmer of Tennessee," and Taylor and Harrison ran as farmers, too.) A biographer of Taylor's opponent, Lewis Cass, defended his work by insisting that a candidate's life was "the property of the people, who have a right to canvass and discuss in detail each item of his history." By now, one biography wasn't quite enough. Whigs accused the Democrats of issuing two lives of Cass, one for the North and one for the South. Taylor's supporters offered no fewer than fourteen. The eleventh President could never have been elected without his biographers' answer to the question posed by his opponent: "Who is James K. Polk?" But what voters mainly needed to know was his nickname, Young Hickory.

In 1852, Nathaniel Hawthorne's college friend Franklin Pierce won the Democratic nomination. ("We Polked them in '44," the slogan ran. "We'll Pierce them in '52.") Hawthorne, who had just finished "The Blithedale Romance," offered to write "the necessary biography." He was an ardent admirer of Jackson, and he saw his friend as yet another Young Hickory. He wrote the book in just over a month and was rewarded, when Pierce won the election, with the consulship at Liverpool (although, as a Northerner endorsing a pro-slavery candidate, Hawthorne lost a good number of friends). Hawthorne had much to offer: Pierce was obscure; Hawthorne was a celebrity. He also lent a masterly canniness to the book's most telling anecdote. In 1847, in the Mexican War, Pierce had served under the command of the man he was now running against, Winfield Scott. (Scott's supporters promoted his ties to Jackson by publishing, in one volume, "The Lives of Winfield Scott and Andrew Jackson.") During a battle outside Mexico City, Pierce's horse fell on him. Whigs, who called Pierce "the hero of many a bottle," said that he was drunk. But Hawthorne turned what followed into an endorsement of Pierce from the mouth of his opponent. The next day, Scott summoned the wounded Pierce:

> "Pierce, my dear fellow, . . . you are not fit to be in your saddle."
>
> "Yes, general, I am," replied Pierce, "in a case like this."
>
> "You cannot touch your foot to the stirrup," said Scott.
>
> "One of them I can," answered Pierce.
>
> The General looked again at Pierce's almost disabled figure, and seemed on the point of taking his irrevocable resolution.
>
> "You are rash, General Pierce," said he; "we shall lose you, and we cannot spare you."

Franklin Pierce proved to be one of the most ineffective American Presidents ever. He served one term, and died, in 1869, of cirrhosis.

"I wrote the life of Lincoln which elected him," William Dean Howells once boasted to Mark Twain. Howells wrote his "Life of Abraham Lincoln" in 1860, when he was twenty-three. (He went on to write some two hundred books, including "The Rise of Silas Lapham," and to serve as an editor of *The Atlantic*.) It is the most affecting campaign biography I have ever read, but that probably has as much to do with my love for Lincoln as with my admiration for Howells, who managed to write at once the best example of the genre and a cunning parody of it. "It is necessary that every American should have an indisputable grandfather," Howells began. About Lincoln's ancestry he had not a clue: "There is a dim possibility that he is of the stock of the New England Lincolns, of Plymouth colony; but the noble science of heraldry is almost obsolete in this country, and none of Mr. Lincoln's family seems to have been aware of the preciousness of long pedigrees." Howells had only weeks to write; he had never met Lincoln; and, as it happened, he didn't think his genealogy mattered. That was his point: we aren't electing the man for his ancestors; we're electing him for his ideas.

Howells proceeded to indulge in every one of the genre's conventions but then, somehow, to transcend them, too. Lincoln's childhood was characterized by nothing so much as "his struggle with the accidents of ignorance and poverty." He lived in "the rude cabin of the settler." He split timber for rails. "Until he was twenty-three, the ax was seldom out of his hand, except in the intervals of labor, or when it was exchanged for the plow, the hoe, or the sickle." But Howells knew that, to lead a country that was falling apart, Lincoln had to bring more than brawn. " 'He has mauled rails!' " Democratic critics scoffed. "What backwoods farmer has not?"

To this question, Howells had an answer. Lincoln wasn't somebody's son. He wasn't a military hero. He was, by nature, a scholar. The scene you can't forget, in Howells, is young Lincoln reading Blackstone's "Commentaries on the Laws of England" in the woods: "He threw himself under a wide-spreading oak, and expansively made a reading desk of the hillside. Here he would pore over Blackstone day after day, shifting his position as the sun rose and sank, so as to keep in the shade, and utterly unconscious of everything but the principles of common law." Lincoln didn't battle his way out of poverty. He read his way out. His was a democracy of literacy.

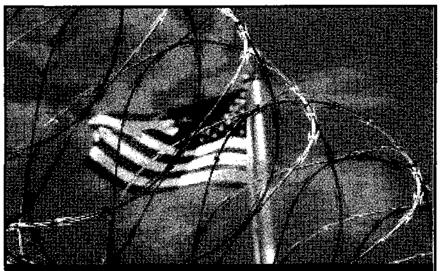
After the Civil War, campaign biographies got goofier, borrowing from Howells's Lincoln not his love of law and learning but his name and his rough-hewn timbers. Garfield was born in a log cabin; his biographers provided illustrations of the family home, complete with measurements. (Garfield's life was, literally, a Horatio Alger story, "From Canal Boy to President.") McKinley—"From Tent to White House"—lacked even logs. Coolidge was born behind clapboards, in a house attached to his father's general store, but his was nevertheless "another story of the Log Cabin to the White House." "The story of Hoover," born on a farm in Iowa, orphaned at nine and a millionaire before he was forty, was "the story of America." Al Smith, the Democratic nominee in 1928, was among the first graduates of the "University of Hard Knocks." Franklin Delano Roosevelt, whose speech nominating Smith for the Presidency was itself published as a campaign biography, left his own biographer in a quandary. His origins were hardly humble. This didn't stop one biographer from answering yes to the question posed by his book's title, "Is Roosevelt an Andrew Jackson?" It wasn't actually a lie to say that he was born in "the old family house on the ancestral farm." (F.D.R. insisted that it not be called an "estate.") And then there were the hardships of Groton: "The Boys slept in dormitories. The alcoves were small and bare. There was one tiny window. There was a bed, a chair, a bureau. That was all."

Adlai Stevenson displayed remarkable candor when he admitted, in 1952, "I wasn't born in a log cabin. I didn't work my way through school nor did I rise from rags to riches, and there's no use trying to pretend I did." He wasn't enough of an Everyman to compete against the "Man from Abilene," Dwight Eisenhower, whose biographer played Ike's home town for all it was worth: "The lusty pioneer energies that built it had moved farther West, but they left behind a robust, independent settlement whose rugged population knew the value of hard work and took for granted the virtues of sturdy individualism." (That's lusty, robust, rugged, hard, and sturdy, all in one sentence.) In 1956, Ike's running mate, the son of a California grocer, merited his own campaign biography: "Life in the home of Frank and Hannah Nixon was good, but it was never soft.” (In a detail much like the footage of the teen-age Bill Clinton shaking Kennedy’s hand at the White House, Nixon’s biographer made a point of mentioning that, as a boy, Nixon slept beneath a portrait of Lincoln.) When Jimmy Carter ran for President, he wrote a campaign autobiography titled “Why Not the Best?” He, too, had the Jacksonian goods, which were getting harder to come by. (Except, maybe, in Alaska.) “We lived in a wooden clapboard house alongside the dirt road which led from Savannah to Columbus, Georgia,” Carter recalled. “There was no source of heat in the northeast corner room where I slept.” (Palin’s childhood bedroom was “unheated,” too. Aside from the woodstove.)

John McCain didn’t grow up on a farm, but he shares with John Eaton’s Andrew Jackson a rebellious youth and a “hair-trigger temper.” Jackson, “like too many young men, sacrificing future prospects to present gratification,” spent money on trifles, and was forever “irritable and hasty.” McCain, whose high-school nickname was Punk, was a regular James Dean: “Clad in blue jeans, motorcycle boots, and his overcoat, smoking a cigarette that dangled from his lips, McCain would sneak into Ninth Street in Washington, go to Waxy Maxy, and buy the latest record by Elvis Presley.” Like Jackson, McCain first achieved national prominence for his military valor and, in McCain’s case, for the tragedy of his long and terrible imprisonment and torture in Vietnam. That happened. It matters. John McCain refused to polish those boots. That this means McCain should be President is the message of Paul Alexander’s revised edition of “Man of the People: The Maverick Life and Career of John McCain” (Wiley; $14.95). “Man of the People” was first published in 2002. But, really, it’s a lot older than that.

Barack Obama’s “Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance” reads a bit like a campaign autobiography, the story of Obama as the story of America. But he wrote it at the end of law school, before running for office, and it’s too searching to belong to the genre: its telling anecdotes tell, mostly, that anecdotes don’t always tell you what you need to know. “Dreams” is Obama’s reckoning with some very old stories that his family told him, especially stories about his father, who left Hawaii to return to Africa in 1963, when Obama was two. (Obama’s Kansas origins are Jacksonian; his Kenyan origins aren’t.) For years, Obama’s maternal grandfather had said that the family left Texas after Obama’s mother, in elementary school, was tormented for playing with a black girl. Nah, Obama’s grandmother said; we left because your grandfather wanted a better job. “She’s wise that way, my grandmother, suspicious of overwrought sentiments or overblown claims,” Obama writes. “Which is why I tend to trust her account of events; it corresponds to what I know about my grandfather, his tendency to rewrite his history to conform with the image he wished for himself.” Sometimes your grandfather’s stories tell you only the half of it.

Americans first voted for a President whose campaign touted him as a rugged, stubborn, hot-tempered war hero, a man of the people, a hundred and eighty-four years ago. There is no older or more hackneyed gambit in American politics, no maneuver less maverick. The Erie Canal is younger. We don’t live in the Age of Jackson anymore. But even people who did had their doubts about Old Hickory, and about the kind of lore-loaded campaigning that his first biographer began. When Abraham Lincoln was elected President in 1860, he named his own Boswell consul to Venice. Still, something troubled him. He read Howells’s “Life of Lincoln” soon after it was published, and in the margins he made corrections. In the White House, he reread it more than once. He checked it out of the Library of Congress twice. It was in his office when he was assassinated. Where Howells had written that Lincoln was, in the eighteen-thirties, “a stanch Adams man,” Lincoln crossed out “Adams” and wrote “anti-Jackson.” And when Howells told of how, as a young congressman, Lincoln had travelled miles and miles, by foot, to the Illinois legislature, Lincoln scribbled in the margin, “No harm, if true; but, in fact, not true. L.” ♦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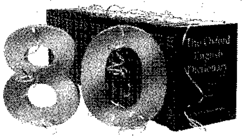
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BOOKS

THUMBSPEAK

Is texting here to stay?

BY LOUIS MENAND

Is texting bringing us closer to the end of life as we currently tolerate it? Enough people have suggested that it is to have inspired David Crystal to produce "Txtng: The Gr8 Db8" (Oxford; $19.95). "I don't think I have ever come across a topic which has attracted more adult antagonism," he says. (On the other hand, Crystal has written more than a hundred books, so he does not require extraordinary encouragement to share his views.) Crystal is a professional linguist, and professional linguists, almost universally, do not believe that any naturally occurring changes in the language can be bad. So his conclusions are predictable: texting is not corrupting the language; people who send text messages that use emoticons, initialisms ("g2g," "lol"), and other shorthands generally know how to spell perfectly well; and the history of language is filled with analogous examples of nonstandard usage. It is good to know that the estimated three billion human beings who own cell phones, and who use them to send more than a trillion text messages every year, are having no effect on anything that we should care about. A trillion text messages, Crystal says, "appear as no more than a few ripples on the surface of the sea of language."

The texting function of the cell phone ought to have been the special province of the kind of people who figure out how to use the television remote to turn on the toaster: it's a huge amount of trouble relative to the results. In some respects, texting is a giant leap backward in the science of communication. It's more efficient than semaphore, maybe, but how much more efficient is it than Morse code? With Morse code, to make an "s" you needed only three key presses. Sending a text message with a numeric keypad feels primitive and improvisational—like the way prisoners speak to each other by tapping on the walls of their cells in "Darkness at Noon," or the way the guy in "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly" writes a book. And, as Crystal points out, although cell phones keep getting smaller, thumbs do not. Usually, if you can text a person you can much more quickly and efficiently call that person. But people sometimes text when they are close enough to talk face to face. People *like* to text. Why is that?

BFF?;)
Select
Info

It is estimated that a trillion text messages are sent and received every year.

STEVE POWERS

Crystal's answer is that texting is, partly, a game. It's like writing a sonnet (well, sort of): the requirement is to adapt the message to immutable formal constraints. A sonnet can't have more than fourteen lines, and a mobile-phone message can't have more than a hundred and forty bytes, which is usually enough for a hundred and sixty characters. This is a challenge to ingenuity, not an invitation to anarchy.

Most of the shortcuts used in texting are either self-evident (@ for "at" and "b" for "be") or new initialisms on the model of the old "A.S.A.P.," "R.S.V.P.," and "B.Y.O.B.": "imho" for "in my humble opinion," and so on. More imaginatively, there are the elaborated emoticons, such as 7:-) for baseball cap, and pictograms, such as @(---`---`---, for a rose and ~(_8^(|) for Homer Simpson. These are for thumb-happy aficionados, though, not the ordinary texter notifying her partner that the flight is late. There is a dialect that is used mainly by kids: "prw" for "parents are watching"; "F?" for "Are we friends again?" But Crystal thinks that texting is not the equivalent of a new language. "People were playing with language in this way long before mobile phones were invented," he points out. "Texting may be using a new technology, but its linguistic processes are centuries old." Acronyms, contractions, abbreviations, and shortened words ("phone" for "telephone," and so forth) are just part of the language. Even back in the days when the dinosaurs roamed the earth and men wrote with typewriters, the language of the office memo was studded with abbreviations: "re:," "cc.," "F.Y.I." "Luv" for "love" dates from 1898; "thanx" was first used in 1936. "Wassup," Crystal notes, originally appeared in a Budweiser commercial. @(---`---`--- is something that E. E. Cummings might have come up with.

Still, despite what they say, size matters. A trillion of anything has to make some change in cultural weather patterns. Texting is international. It may have come late to the United States because personal computers became a routine part of life much earlier here than in other countries, and so people could e-mail and Instant Message (which shares a lot of texting lingo). Crystal provides lists of text abbreviations in eleven languages besides English. And it is clear from the lists that different cultures have had to solve the problem of squeezing commonly delivered messages onto the cell-phone screen according to their own particular national needs. In the Czech Republic, for example, "hosipa" is used for "*Hovno si pamatuju*": "I can't remember anything." One can imagine a wide range of contexts in which Czech texters might have recourse to that sentiment. French texters have devised "ght2v1," which means "*J'ai acheté du vin*." In Germany, "nok" is an efficient solution to the problem of how to explain "*Nicht ohne Kondom*"—"not without condom." If you receive a text reading "aun" from the fine Finnish lady you met in the airport lounge, she is telling you "*Älä unta nää*"—in English, "Dream on."

But the lists also suggest that texting has accelerated a tendency toward the Englishing of world languages. Under the constraints of the numeric-keypad technology, English has some advantages. The average English word has only five letters; the average Inuit word, for example, has fourteen. English has relatively few characters; Ethiopian has three hundred and forty-five symbols, which do not fit on most keypads. English rarely uses diacritical marks, and it is not heavily inflected. Languages with diacritical marks, such as Czech, almost always drop them in text messages. Portuguese texters often substitute "m" for the tilde. Some Chinese texters use Pinyin—that is, the practice of writing Chinese words using the Roman alphabet.

But English is also the language of much of the world's popular culture. Sometimes it is more convenient to use the English term, but often it is the aesthetically preferred term—the cooler expression. Texters in all eleven languages that Crystal lists use "lol," "u," "brb," and "gr8," all English-based shorthands. The Dutch use "2m" to mean "tomorrow"; the French have been known to use "now," which is a lot easier to type than "*maintenant*." And there is what is known as "code-mixing," in which two languages—one of them invariably English—are conflated in a single expression. Germans write "mbsseg" to mean "mail back *so schnell es geht*" ("as fast as you can"). So texting has probably done some damage to the planet's cultural ecology, to lingo-diversity. People are better able to communicate across national borders, but at some cost to variation.

The obvious appeal of texting is its speed. There is, as it happens, a Ten Commandments of texting, as laid down by one Norman Silver, the author of "Laugh Out Loud :-D." The Fourth of these commandments reads, "u shall b prepard @ all times 2 tXt & 2 recv." This is the new decorum in communication: you can be sloppy and you can be blunt, but you have to be fast. To delay is to disrespect. In fact, delay is the only disrespect. Any other misunderstanding can be cleared up by a few more exchanges.

Back when most computing was done on a desktop, people used to complain about how much pressure they felt to respond quickly to e-mail. At least, in those days, it was understood that you might have walked away from your desk. There is no socially accepted excuse for being without your cell phone. "I didn't have my phone": that just does not sound believable. Either you are lying or you are depressed or you have something to hide. If you receive a text, therefore, you are obliged instantaneously to reply to it, if only to confirm that you are not one of those people who can be without a phone. The most common text message must be "k." It means "I have nothing to say, but God forbid that you should think that I am ignoring your message." The imperative to reply is almost addictive, which is probably one reason that texting can be not just rude (people continually sneaking a look at their cell phones, while you're talking with them, in case some message awaits) but deadly. It was reported that the engineer in the fatal Los Angeles commuter-train crash this fall was texting seconds before the accident occurred. The *Times* noted recently that four of ten teen-agers claim that they can text blindfolded. As long as they don't think that they can drive blindfolded.

A less obvious attraction of texting is that it uses a telephone to avoid what many people dread about face-to-face exchanges, and even about telephones—having to have a real, unscripted conversation. People don't like to have to perform the amount of self-presentation that is required in a personal encounter. They don't want to deal with the facial expressions, the body language, the obligation to be witty or interesting. They just want to say "flt is lte." Texting is so formulaic that it is nearly anonymous. There is no penalty for using catchphrases, because that is the accepted glossary of texting. C. K. Ogden's "Basic English" had a vocabulary of eight hundred and fifty words. Most texters probably make do with far fewer than that. And there is no penalty for abruptness in a text message. Shortest said, best said. The faster the other person can reply, the less you need to say. Once, a phone call was quicker than a letter, and face-to-face was quicker than a phone call. Now e-mail is quicker than face-to-face, and texting, because the respondent is almost always armed with his or her device and ready to reply, is quicker than e-mail.

"For the moment, texting seems here to stay," Crystal concludes. Aun, as the Finns say. It's true that all technology is, ultimately, interim technology, but texting, in the form that Crystal studies, is a technology that is nearing its obsolescence. Once the numeric keypad is replaced by the QWERTY keyboard on most mobile messaging devices, and once the capacity of those devices increases, we are likely to see far fewer initialisms and pictograms. Discourse will migrate back up toward the level of e-mail. But it will still be important to reach out and touch someone. Nok, though. Danke. ♦

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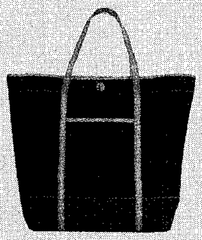

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PLACE SETTINGS

Emily Post, at home.

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

New York's moneyed class has always loved to read about itself. In the early years of the twentieth century, it particularly loved to do so in a magazine called *Town Topics: The Journal of Society*. Far and away the weekly's most popular feature, titled "Saunterings," offered material of a sort that other publications, many of which had society columns of their own, deemed unprintable.

In late June, 1905, Edwin Post, a financier who had recently suffered a string of losses, received a visit from a representative of *Town Topics* named Charles Ahle. Ahle carried with him a letter of introduction from the magazine's managing editor, along with a set of galleys. He offered Post a choice. Post could purchase a copy of a forthcoming book, a sort of *Who's Who* of the *Social Register* crowd, tentatively titled "America's Smart Set," for the sum of five hundred dollars. (This price—roughly ten thousand dollars in today's money—was, Ahle asserted, a bargain.) Or he could turn down the book, in which case he could expect to read about himself in "Saunterings." The item would describe how Post, a resident of Manhattan and Tuxedo Park, New York, kept a studio apartment in Stamford, Connecticut. There he liked to entertain "a fair charmer" who favored "white shoes with red heels and patent leather tips." Post told Ahle that he needed a few days to consider the matter.

For reasons that are unclear—some accounts suggest that he simply couldn't come up with the money—Post, instead of playing along, went to the police. On July 11th, he arranged a rendezvous with Ahle in the gentlemen's washroom of the Holland House restaurant, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Thirtieth Street. As soon as he handed Ahle an envelope containing five hundred-dollar bills, a cop leaped out of one of the stalls.

Ahle's arrest, splashed across the front pages of the city's many dailies, became the talk of the town. In the legal wrangle that ensued—lawsuits followed by countersuits—numerous reputations were damaged. It was revealed, for example, that some of the highest members of high society, including John Jacob Astor, Stanford White, and William K. Vanderbilt, Jr., had already made substantial down payments for deluxe editions of the book offered to Post. Though their interest could perhaps have been literary, it was generally assumed that they had paid to prevent details of their own "saunterings" from appearing in print. When asked about these and other disclosures, *Town Topics's* publisher, a Civil War veteran named William D'Alton Mann, defended his magazine, maintaining that it was on a moral mission.

"My ambition is to reform the Four Hundred by making them too deeply disgusted with themselves to continue their silly, empty way of life," he told the *Times*. "I am also teaching the great American public not to pay any attention to these silly fools."

Among those most embarrassed by the affair was Post's wife, Emily. Her marriage had been in trouble for years, but, to protect her two young sons, she had pretended that nothing was amiss. Now everyone who mattered to her, and millions more, could read about her husband's unfaithfulness. In a final show of conjugal solidarity, she accompanied him to the courtroom and listened to him testify against Ahle. Six months later, the couple filed for divorce.

Emily Post could have responded to the whole sordid episode in several ways. She could have slipped away in shame. She could have turned against the "smart set" in anger. But her response was neither to run nor to fight. Instead, she chose to celebrate the mores of her class, even, in a manner of speaking, to *become* them.

"Etiquette," Post's monument to American manners, was first published in 1922. Even at that Gatsbyesque moment, the audience that it addressed was minuscule. "Etiquette" takes it for granted that its readers are the kind of people who employ butlers and ladies' maids—"it is seldom practical for a debutante and her mother to share a maid"—who leave visiting cards, and keep "dinner lists," and have one set of stationery for their city addresses and another set for their country homes. ("A big house in important grounds should have very plain, very dignified letter paper.") The publisher, Funk & Wagnalls, had only modest hopes for "Etiquette," and put in an initial order for five thousand copies. The book spent eighteen months on the best-seller list, and in that period had to be reprinted at least eight times.

A quarter of a century and seven editions later, "Etiquette" was still selling more than three thousand copies a week. (During the Second World War, it was supposedly the book most often requested by G.I.s.) *Time* dubbed Post the "undisputed autocrat of U.S. etiquette." *Life* observed that her name had ceased to refer to an actual person and, instead, had become "a synonym for etiquette and manners, more widely used perhaps than even the words themselves." In 1950, a survey of female reporters identified Post as the second most influential woman in America, just after Eleanor Roosevelt.

Today, of course, you can barely dig up a débutante, let alone a ladies' maid. And yet from the great beyond Emily Post continues to offer counsel. "Etiquette," revised and edited by her great-granddaughter-in-law, a former flight attendant, is now in its seventeenth edition. (Thumb tabs have been added for ease of reference.) Various Post relations write deportment columns for, among other publications, *Good Housekeeping, Parents*, and the Boston *Globe*. On its Web site, the Emily Post Institute provides guidance on subjects ranging from holiday tipping (for a pet groomer, one session's fee is appropriate) to exercising at the gym ("Wipe up your sweat, please!"). There is even a feature called "What Would Emily Do?," which each week takes up a new, post-Post question, such as whether it's permissible to text-message from a luncheon party and "How do you tell a co-worker that she has an odor?"

"Emily Post: Daughter of the Gilded Age, Mistress of American Manners" (Random House; $30), by Laura Claridge, is the first full-length biography of the author to appear. (Post's son, Ned, published an affectionate, ghostwritten memoir, "Truly Emily Post," back in 1961.) Claridge, a former English professor at the U.S. Naval Academy, has written previous biographies of Norman Rockwell and the Art Deco painter Tamara de Lempicka. In turning her attention to Post, she takes up two mysteries. One has to do with etiquette: why, in a supposedly classless society like America, do so many people fret about table manners? And the other has to do with "Etiquette": how did Post convert social disgrace into such a triumph?

Before Post became an etiquette expert, she was singed by scandal.

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Emily Price was born in Baltimore on October 27, 1872. (According to Claridge, she was "confused"—probably purposefully—about her birth date, which is often listed as the following year.) Her father, Bruce, was an influential architect whose design credits would eventually include the American Surety Building, in lower Manhattan; Château Frontenac, in Quebec City; and the Jay Gould estate, in Lakewood, New Jersey. Her mother, Josephine, was an heiress to a Pennsylvania coal fortune. When Emily was five, the family moved to Manhattan, where they occupied a brick town house on West Tenth Street.

The Prices didn't have the bloodlines of New York's true élite—the so-called Four Hundred—but between Bruce's talent and Josephine's money they managed to insert themselves into what Emily would later term "Best Society." In 1885, Price was commissioned to lay out Tuxedo Park. Families like the Astors and the Pells soon bought lots in Tuxedo Park, thirty-five miles north of Manhattan, as a result of which it became *the* place to spend the late summer, beating out such old society favorites as Lenox and Newport. Price built a cluster of "cottages" for his own family in Tuxedo Park, and Emily, in Claridge's words, became the community's "resident princess."

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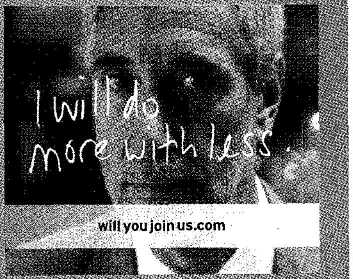
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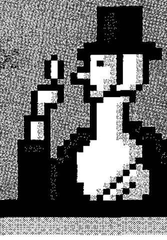


NYMPH AND SHEPHERD

She died a dozen times before I died,
And kept on dying, nymph of fatality.
I could not die but once although I tried.

I envied her. She whooped, she laughed, she cried
As she contrived each fresh mortality,
Numberless lethal times before I died.

I plunged, I plugged, I twisted, and I sighed
While she achieved death's Paradise routinely.
I lagged however zealously I tried.

She writhed, she bucked, she rested, and, astride,
She posted, cantering on top of me
At least a hundred miles until I died.

I'd never blame you if you thought I lied
About her deadly prodigality.
She died a dozen times before I died
Who could not die so frequently. I tried.

—*Donald Hall*

By the time Emily was a teen-ager, in the late eighteen-eighties, the ritual of "coming out" had become so elaborate that only the most well-drilled débutantes could hope to make a good impression. Among the many dance figures they were expected to know were Blindman's Bluff, the Ladies Mocked, the Cards, the Ropes, the Mirror, the Dresden (in which participants pretended to be pieces of china), the Hobby-Horse (for which the men were supplied with horse costumes and the women with little whips), and Mother Goose (which featured a specially dressed society matron holding a live goose under her arm). As her own début approached, Emily, who had already taken years of lessons, devoted herself nearly full time to practicing her steps, experimenting with hair styles, and being fitted for gowns. She "came out" at Delmonico's, then situated on East Twenty-sixth Street, in December, 1889.

At the ideal débutante ball, the young woman being presented meets and falls in love with the man she will eventually marry. As Emily liked to tell it, this is precisely what happened at hers. Supposedly, she caught sight of Edwin Post while she was waltzing by in the arms of another. He was trim and handsome, and, as it turns out, possessed a near-perfect pedigree. (It included, importantly, Dutch ancestors.)

For her part, Emily was considered a great beauty. Photographs from the time show her to have been slender and tall—Edwin was a few inches shorter—with pale skin, dark hair, and a thin nose. In the spring of 1892, when Edwin was twenty-two and Emily was nineteen, the couple got married in Tuxedo Park. The following year, they rented what Emily considered to be a modest five-bedroom house on Staten Island. In the summer of 1893, Ned, their first son, was born. Their second son, Bruce, followed in 1895.

Outwardly, everything seemed to be going swimmingly for the young Posts. The pair travelled to Europe, bought themselves a town house on the Upper West Side, threw elaborate dinner parties, and spent their summers on the South Shore of Long Island. Privately, however, they were growing to detest each other. Why, exactly, is obscure. Claridge makes much of the fact that Edwin was an avid sailor, while Emily was prone to seasickness. But, with the sort of diffidence Emily herself always advocated, Claridge only hints at the possibility that other, more intimate forms of incompatibility were at work. (It is worth noting that after her divorce, at the age of thirty-four, Emily does not appear to have had another sexual relationship.) The couple continued to be seen together socially—the *Times,* for instance, reported that they attended a bridge tournament at the Tuxedo Park clubhouse—even as they spent less and less time together. When Edwin was not at work, he could mostly be found on his boat. He complained in his sailing log that, having "committed matrimony," he had been "sentenced to life for it." Emily, meanwhile, turned to writing. Her first book, a novel titled "The Flight of the Moth," appeared in 1904. It was based partly on her own experience and partly, it seems, on wishful thinking: after five unhappy years of marriage, the narrator's husband dies in a dreadful accident. "The French say that the ideal condition for a woman would be to be born a widow," the book's heroine explains.

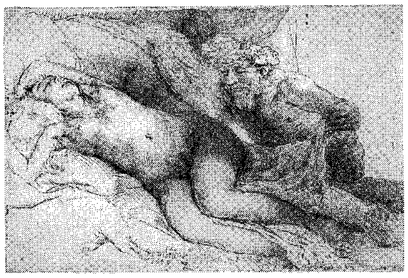
"The Flight of the Moth" was respectfully reviewed—the *Times* declared it "lively and thoughtful"—and, following her divorce, Post took to writing more or less full time. She was at this point residing in Tuxedo Park—her sons were away at boarding school—in a "cottage" that had been given to her by her father. (Though Edwin had been financially ruined and paid no alimony, Emily continued to live more than comfortably—and with several servants—off various inheritances.) In 1909, she published "The Title Market," a novel about an American ingénue who is nearly seduced by an Italian count, and in 1910 "The Eagle's Feather," about a Polish playwright who must choose between his art and his beautiful but doomed mistress. As an author, Post was entirely self-trained; beyond her years at finishing school, she had no formal education, and to the extent that her friends evinced any interest in her literary career it was to warn her not to take it too seriously. The more Post published, though, the worse the reviews became, and eventually she gave up on fiction. She began writing articles on such subjects as "What Makes a Girl Popular in Society" for magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Collier's.* In 1915, she took a cross-country car trip with Ned and wrote up their adventures—roadside cows, country cooking, bad hotel plumbing—in a travelogue titled "By Motor to the Golden Gate."

According to Ned, when Post decided to write "Etiquette," in 1920, she intended it to serve as a sort of antidote to the guides that were popular at the time. During the Gilded Age, the rules of etiquette had become increasingly baroque; to be considered well-bred, a lady had to know not just how to wield a knife and fork but where to seat the guest of honor at a formal dinner, how to arrange a receiving line, when to send flowers to whom, and what to wear to a morning function, an afternoon function, and a ball. (As one etiquette writer of the eighteen-eighties observed, "Not even a saint could, from 'inner consciousness' alone, evolve a conception of the thousand and one social observances of modern fashionable life.") Etiquette books had, naturally, followed suit; Emily Holt's popular "Encyclopedia of Etiquette," first published in 1901, was more than five hundred pages. By contrast, Post said that she wanted to write a small book, a "sensible book," because "the whole subject can be reduced to a few simple rules."

Post worked on "Etiquette" for nearly two years. Claridge describes her daily routine as follows: she woke at 6:30 A.M., ate breakfast in bed, and began to write. Midmorning, she took a break to give instructions to the household help; then, still in bed, she continued to write until noon. Somewhere along the way, Post either changed her mind or simply lost sight of her original goal. By the time she was finished, "Etiquette" ran to two hundred and fifty thousand words, took up more than six hundred pages, and was even larger than Holt's "Encyclopedia."

For the most part, Post's book is Holt's "Encyclopedia" reworked and slightly updated. For instance, where Holt declares that calling cards must be printed on "pure white bristol board of medium weight, with the surface polished, not glazed," Post maintains, "All visiting cards are engraved on white unglazed bristol board, which may be of medium thickness or thin." This is Holt on the subject of napkins: "On the plate is placed a large white dinner napkin, folded and ironed square, with the monogram corner showing, and with a dinner roll or a square of bread laid between the folds." And this is Post:

> A dinner napkin folded square and flat is laid on each "place" plate; very fancy foldings are not in good taste, but if the napkin is very large, the sides are folded in so as to make a flattened roll a third the width of its height. (Bread should *not* be put in the napkin—not nowadays.)



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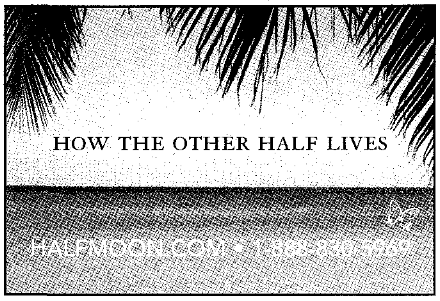

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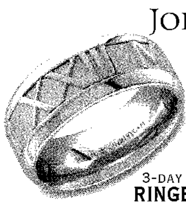

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Post was responsible for one important innovation, presumably inspired by her earlier career as a novelist. "Etiquette" has characters—the Worldlys, the Wellborns, the Toploftys—who periodically appear and reappear to make introductions, hold christenings, and ask friends to their great camps for the weekend. In what might be described as the climax of the book, a newly married young woman whom Post refers to simply as "you" invites all three couples over for dinner. The party is a disaster: the fire in the drawing room smokes; the cook produces a watery fish mousse topped with a curdled hollandaise; and the serving maid, instead of removing the plates one by one, clatters them together in a pile. Later, after the guests have left, the young woman's husband tries to reassure her, telling her "it was not so bad," but she refuses to be comforted. She has failed, and in front of Mrs. Worldly, a woman so discerning that, "if the slightest detail is amiss, an ornament out of place, or there is one dull button on a footman's livery, her house telephone is rung at once." Ostensibly, the lesson of this drama is that the young woman should have held a series of "little dinners" before attempting a larger one, but the deeper message, which is, of course, the implicit message of all etiquette books, is that without the author's advice "you" run the risk of constant humiliation.

Just who bought "Etiquette" is hard to know. (The owners of houses that employed footmen presumably didn't need anyone to tell them that "footmen take turns in answering the door.") In response to feedback she received to the first edition, Post, in 1927, produced a revised version that made significant concessions to the middle class, a group she referred to as "the servantless." Among the additions was a new character, Mrs. Three-in-One, who, at her dinner parties, acts not just as hostess but also as cook and waitress. Mrs. Three-in-One devises all sorts of clever schemes for making the evening run smoothly; to serve dessert from the table, for example, she hides a freezer full of ice cream under her chair. Her guests, the ever-popular Worldlys and Toploftys, supposedly are delighted by her ingenuity. In subsequent editions, Post included successively more instructions for the servantless—for instance, advice on how a stenographer should enter her boss's office—while still retaining the (increasingly anachronistic) rules for managing a valet. The result was that "Etiquette" swelled to nearly nine hundred pages.

In the nineteen-thirties, Post launched a syndicated column, titled "In Good Taste," which was eventually featured in nearly two hundred newspapers. She also began to appear regularly on the radio. (She had now moved back to Manhattan, to East Seventy-ninth Street.) Post always claimed that she was more interested in weighty questions of morality than she was in the finer points of table manners. She told a reporter from the Brooklyn *Eagle* that her goal in speaking on the radio was to "get to the root of the matter and talk about really important things." It was her listeners, she complained, who kept dragging the conversation back to which fork to use.

Claridge not only accepts Post's account but goes it one better. "Etiquette," she claims, is a key text in the history of American democracy. "Emily Post's life and work would have been inconceivable without the story of Ellis Island, and the millions of immigrants who sought to become what they considered to be real Americans during Emily's lifetime," she writes. These outsiders to Best Society turned to "Etiquette" to become insiders. Claridge attributes to Post a "natural inclusiveness," and quotes approvingly her assertion, in 1937, that she had done more to "knock down the social walls which used to enclose fashionable society than even Mr. Roosevelt."

Claridge makes much of the testimony of Post's own employees, some of whom she managed to interview. By all accounts, the author treated the help with consideration. When she learned, for example, that it was onerous for her staff to bring her breakfast in bed at six-thirty, she allowed her tray to be set up the evening before. And when her longtime seamstress died, in 1947, she paid for the burial and sent the woman's hard-up family thirteen hundred dollars.

But to turn Post into Emma Lazarus would require a more radical rereading of American history than Claridge—or perhaps anyone—can supply. Along with most of the other members of the Tuxedo Park set, Post detested F.D.R. and everything he stood for. Like her invention Mrs. Worldly, she could see when a single ornament was out of place; the flip side was that she could choose not to see so much else. (As Claridge notes in a telling aside, Post didn't like to talk about "distressing matters, or even think about them much.") By the time Post died, in 1960, in her Manhattan apartment, she had lived through almost a century's worth of social transformations—the Russian Revolution, the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, the Depression, the rise of Nazism, the bombing of Hiroshima, and the early stirrings of the civil-rights movement. Not only were her professional judgments unaffected by these developments; she seems on a personal level to have been uninterested in them. There is no record of her having had anything penetrating to say, even in private, on the major issues of her day. And, by her own rules, she really couldn't have.

In a section of the original edition of "Etiquette" titled "Think Before You Speak," Post lays down what she considers to be the first principle of conversation: "Try to do and say those things only which will be agreeable to others." Obeying this "first rule" certainly would prevent many awkward interactions. It would also preclude discussion of any topic that could possibly matter. In a later edition of "Etiquette," Post added a section on what she called "American neighborhood customs." (These include such prosaic entertainments as baby showers and bridge parties.) Here the first principle is that "all well-bred persons" should "follow the customs of the locality in which they live. In other words to *do exactly as your neighbors do* is the only sensible rule."

Anyone who turned to "Etiquette" to advance up the social hierarchy learned from Post's book that the key was conformity. This was a lesson that Post herself had clearly internalized. Unlike the typical author biography, which suggests that salvation comes in the form of self-expression—shame and alienation converted into art—her life story testifies to the redemptive power of repression. Emily Post became Emily Post by doing what Emily Post advised. She learned the rules, and she followed them. ♦

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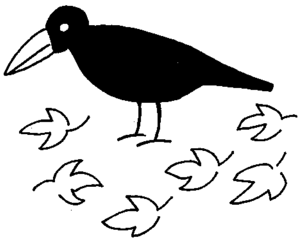
From the archives: Dorothy Parker reviews Emily Post.

BRIEFLY NOTED

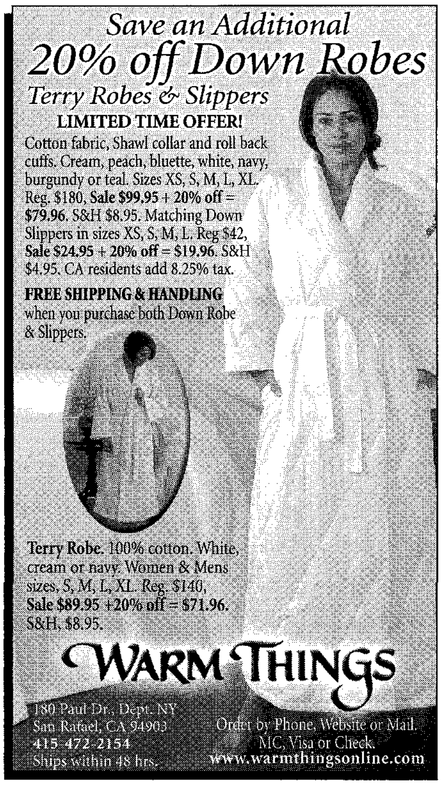
The Elegance of the Hedgehog, *by Muriel Barbery, translated from the French by Alison Anderson (Europa; $15).* In this supple novel of ideas, a best-seller in France, the unschooled middle-aged concierge of an upper-class Paris apartment building acts like a stereotypical concierge, leaving the television on all day and sharing her quarters with an old, fat cat, but she secretly consumes vast quantities of literature. A few floors above her, the brilliant and prematurely disillusioned twelve-year-old daughter of a "holier-than-thou-left-wing-intellectual" family is planning arson and suicide, unless she can find something worth living for beyond the "vacuousness of bourgeois existence." Unbeknown to each other, the two autodidacts share an allergy to grammatical errors (the concierge considers a misplaced comma an "underhanded attack") and a love of tea and moments of ineffable beauty. Barbery's sly wit, which bestows lightness on the most ponderous cogitations, keeps her tale aloft.

The English Major, *by Jim Harrison (Grove; $24).* The protagonist of this wistfully comic novel is a sixty-year-old English teacher turned farmer, whose wife has left him for another man, and who takes to the road in the quixotic pursuit of renaming all the birds and all the states. Along the way, he picks up a neurotic, sex-hungry former student; despairs of road food; wanders into the desert without enough water; and muses on the ways life can suddenly turn upside down ("The very idea of self-reliance seemed banal when you weren't sure who your self was"). The premise is well-worn, but Harrison has created a character of such appeal and self-deprecating wisdom that even the more fantastical episodes—a nubile young woman cavorting in the nude for his pleasure—acquire a charmingly philosophical air.



The House at Sugar Beach, *by Helene Cooper (Simon & Schuster; $25).* Cooper is a descendant of the Congo People—the élite who once governed Liberia—and can trace her ancestry to the freed American slaves who colonized the country in the eighteen-hundreds. In 1980, she and her family fled Monrovia following a coup; her mother was raped and, on her fourteenth birthday, a cabinet-minister cousin was publicly executed. Decades later, as a reporter in Washington, D.C., she is impelled by stories from a disintegrating Monrovia to return, to "the ninth circle of hell, where ten-year-olds were taken from their parents and forced to fight in the country's never-ending civil wars." She sets out to find a foster sister whom she hasn't seen in twenty-three years, and who represents her childhood self, her Liberian voice. Despite a sometimes flip tone, there is tenderness in this memoir, and Cooper is clear-eyed even as she tells of her loss.

Antoine's Alphabet: Watteau and His World, *by Jed Perl (Knopf; $25).* In 1944, Cyril Connolly, having just passed his fortieth birthday and in a melancholy mood, published "The Unquiet Grave," a gloriously strange book of fragments, quotations, epigrams, impressions, and wartime journal entries—a kind of aesthetic autobiography—under the pseudonym Palinurus. Perl, the art critic for the *New Republic*, has written a similarly allusive, fragmentary, and personal book, with his favorite painter, the playful eighteenth-century master Antoine Watteau, at its center. As a journalist, Perl is an intelligent and often fierce critic of the contemporary art scene, but here, reflecting on Watteau and much else, he is in an almost purely passionate mode. Arranged in a Flaubertian alphabetic format—entries run from "Actors," a frequent subject for Watteau, to "Zeuxis," an ancient Greek painter whose works are lost but whose fame remains—Perl's glittering, shard-like essays encompass everything from penetrating studies of individual pictures to meditations on "painting's primal power."



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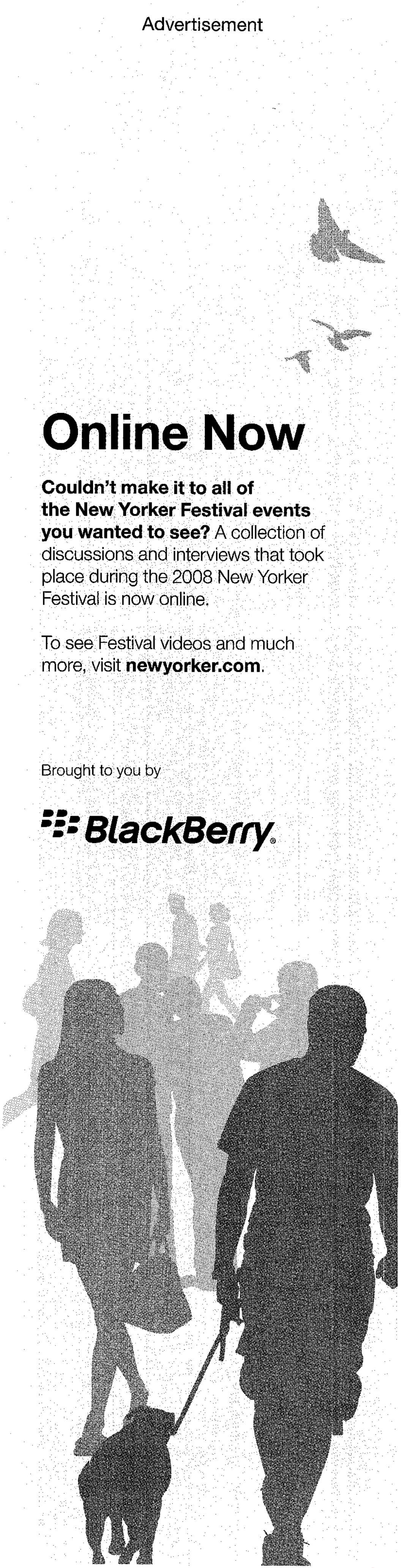
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BOOKS

FIRE AND ICE

Per Petterson's "To Siberia."

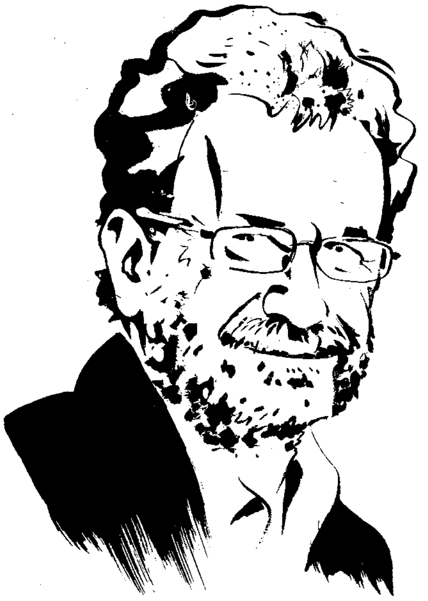
BY JEFFREY FRANK

On April 7, 1990, the ferryboat Scandinavian Star sailed from Oslo toward Frederikshavn, in the northern part of Denmark, carrying nearly five hundred passengers. The ship caught fire, and more than a hundred and fifty people perished. Four of the dead belonged to the family of the Norwegian novelist Per Petterson: his mother and father, a younger brother, and the niece of another brother.

Petterson was thirty-seven at the time, a mildly successful writer who was unknown beyond Scandinavia. It took him nearly ten years to come face to face with this catastrophe, and the result was "In the Wake," whose narrator, a forty-three-year-old novelist, experiences a similar calamity. The voice is at times grief-stricken, at times helpless; the narrator tells us that when he watched the doomed ship on television "suddenly my feet felt icy cold. A paralysing cold which hurt." Frequently, he sounds overheated, not quite rational, almost like one of Petterson's literary ancestors, the young man of Knut Hamsun's "Hunger": "The brown Coke spurts out of the nozzle all over my trousers, my shoes and the newspaper. I start to weep. I have been on my way down for a long time, and now I am there."

Petterson hadn't written anything like that before, and never has again, but some of the moods of "In the Wake"—its pressing sense of imminent loss and abandonment—are very much part of two other fine novels, "Out Stealing Horses," published in America last year to much acclaim, and "To Siberia" (Graywolf; $22), which is just out here. What happened to the Scandinavian Star seems to have transformed Petterson as a novelist; although there is no mention of the ship's fire in his other books, it burns on every page.

"To Siberia," first published in Norway twelve years ago, is not an easy book; the story jumps around in time and place, and not much happens for long stretches. The narrator, who is said to be based on Petterson's mother, a Dane, is a woman of sixty. She recalls her life from the nineteen-thirties, when she was six or seven, until she was an unwed mother in her early twenties. Her family lives in the northern part of Jutland, the Danish peninsula—"as far as it was possible to travel from Copenhagen and still have streets to walk along"—where her father, an expert joiner, "works his way downward" until his business goes into hock. Her mother writes and sings hymns, which the daughter can't stand. "She has one foot on earth and one in heaven," she says, without affection.


Per Petterson

PAUL HAMLYN

Life at home is forbidding, and the mood is not lightened by a grandfather who is subject to periodic rages, drinking binges, and, as it turns out, suicidal impulses. The girl's isolation worsens when a school friend—the headmaster's daughter—dies of some mysterious ailment. The only one who truly understands her is Jesper, her brother, who is three years older, and we begin to worry about his fate from the moment we're informed that "he has been dead for more than half my life."

The bond between Jesper and "Sister-mine," as he calls her, is tender and powerful; their connection—an intense sibling love that, briefly, uncomfortably, seems to veer toward something else—is part of what gives "To Siberia" its curious hold.

Jesper and his sister, not surprisingly, imagine other places, distant ones. For her, it is Siberia, with "open skies that were cold and clear, where it was easy to breathe and easy to see for long distances." For Jesper, it is Morocco, and "his pictures were mysterious and alluring in black and white with barren mountains in the far distance and sun-scorched faces and sun-scorched towns." Their own small town, which seems to serve as a way station to the fashionable beaches at Skagen, at the northernmost tip of Jutland, envelops them just as surely as the long winter nights.

Scandinavian literature was at its height in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and that is where you find Petterson's literary roots—not only in Hamsun but in the quiet, descriptive passages of J. P. Jacobsen's "Mogens" and in the working-class fiction of Martin Andersen Nexø. "To Siberia" is written in language that is clear, rhythmic, and often evocative:

> There were the great plains with unbroken lines, and a sky and a light as from the dawn of the world, and timbered houses and flocks of birds like a thousand flamingoes that changed into seagulls when they took off and flew and filled the world before they dissolved and were gone.

Petterson could be labelled a "prose stylist," except you never feel that he is styling anything; you feel that he is simply setting down sentences, unaffected by slang and hip foreign expressions. (This comes through remarkably well in the faithful translations of Anne Born.) His plots unfold much as life does, taking unexpected turns that force the author to confront destiny's hazards. A scene in "To Siberia" (Jesper slips off a rock, and is nearly drowned) has its variation in "In the Wake" (two young brothers are drifting on an ice floe), and in the astonishing "Out Stealing Horses," where a childhood pal of the narrator's forgets to remove a gun's cartridge. In that novel, the narrator, who lives alone (he is mourning the death of his wife and a sister), looks back fifty years, to the summer of 1948, when he stayed with his somewhat mysterious father. In "To Siberia," the sorrowful narrator is also living deeply in her memories.

Petterson's novels are claustrophobic and melancholy; Jesper and his sister might be able to imagine places like Irkutsk and Marrakech, but it is not easy to imagine Petterson's characters breaking free of their enclosed existences. Or so it seems until something bursts in on them. In "To Siberia," it comes on April 9, 1940, when the Germans arrive: "We woke to the roar of airplanes swooping so low over the roofs of the town that we could see the black iron crosses painted on the underside of their wings."

The war—the strains that it put on the country, and its aftermath—had a powerful grip on Norwegians of an earlier generation. The Nazi occupation of Norway (and the Quisling next door) was all the more unsettling because of the interconnectedness of neighbors and families who had known each other for generations. Although Petterson was born in 1952, the subject has got hold of him, too. Denmark's resistance was not nearly so fierce as Norway's, but by August, 1943, the Danes, almost en masse, stopped coöperating. (A month later, they rescued most of the country's Jewish population.) When Jesper, who dreamed of joining the International Brigades in Spain, wants to work with the Danish resistance, his fearful sister remembers, "We had been Hitler's little pet, but now it was *war*."

Petterson's real interest, though, is in the physical and emotional distances that separate his characters from each other and from their former selves. The girl in "To Siberia" does escape in small ways; she works in Copenhagen as a telephone operator, goes to Stockholm and Oslo, and has unhappy affairs. She remembers returning to her childhood home in Jutland, anticipating a reunion with her beloved brother, who had managed to reach Morocco. "Are you expecting a child?" her mother wants to know, and, when her daughter replies that she is, the mother asks, "And can you show me your wedding ring?" There is no ring, of course, and the girl, now twenty-three, encounters silence: "The blue gaze met mine, and I looked into hers, but there was nothing there." At such moments, the past and present collide almost violently, and it all sneaks up on you in a way that makes you catch your breath. ♦

The New Yorker, Nov. 12, 1927
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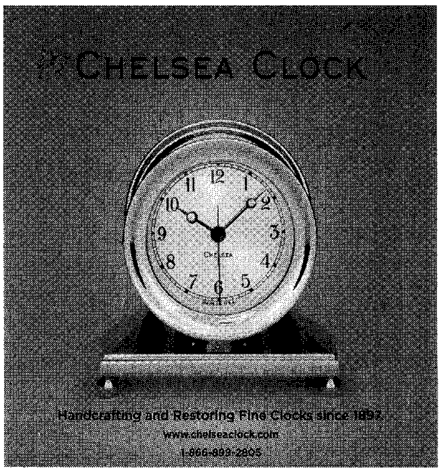

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DANCING

SECOND LOOK

The return of Christopher Wheeldon's Morphoses.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

No ballet company in the United States is being watched more closely right now than Morphoses, the troupe that Christopher Wheeldon founded last year. Wheeldon was the first really interesting choreographer to turn up in American ballet after the death of George Balanchine, in 1983. Born in England and trained at the Royal Ballet School, in London, Wheeldon danced at the Royal for two years and then, in 1993, transferred to New York City Ballet. He had begun choreographing in England, but in America he went at it harder, and in 2000, at the age of twenty-eight—very early for a dancer—he quit performing in order to make ballets full time. City Ballet obligingly made him its resident choreographer, and in his seven years in that post he made thirty-five ballets, many for N.Y.C.B., the others for a wide range of American and European companies. He was a hot ticket. And so, when he put together a company of his own last year, there was a great fuss in the advance press. Here was the new sensation, the articles said—a scrappy little competitor for City Ballet and American Ballet Theatre. Then Morphoses had its first season, and, as is often the case in such situations, the writers found that the Second Coming hadn't come after all. Wheeldon wasn't perfect! He wasn't Balanchine! Two weeks ago, at City Center, Morphoses opened its second New York season, in a quieter atmosphere—the press had moved on to other novelties—and we were able to see Wheeldon's creation more clearly.

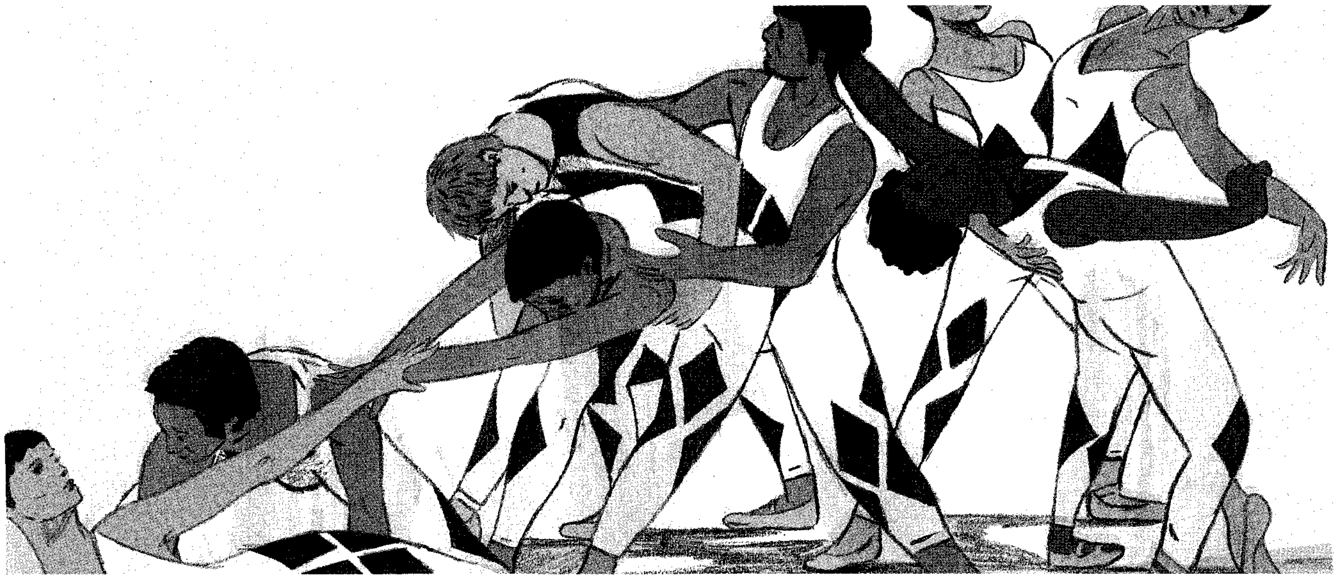
Wheeldon does have a strong link with Balanchine, but who doesn't, these days? Some artists (not necessarily the greatest ones) make a discovery that utterly changes the rules of the art they're working in. So it was with Balanchine. In his 1957 "Agon," to a score by Stravinsky, he made a five-minute pas de deux for a man and a woman (Arthur Mitchell and Diana Adams) that altered the direction of classical dance. In most prior ballets, there had been a culminating duet for the lead couple, and it expressed the central meaning of the piece, but in a decorous fashion, with the tutu and the good manners. In the "Agon" pas de deux, the dancers wore practice clothes. The dancing was stark, angular, extreme, with great lunges and falls. The piece seemed to be about modern life, not about swans and princes. Actually, Balanchine's duet had to do with much the same thing as "Swan Lake": fatal love. But the "Agon" pas de deux brought that subject up to date, made it seem real to people who knew about skyscrapers and atomic bombs.

Many of the ballets made in the past fifty years, above all in the United States, can be traced back to "Agon." There was one powerful competing influence: that of the Bolshoi Ballet, when it came West for the first time, in 1956, a year before the première of "Agon." The Bolshoi's athleticism and emotionalism made a huge impression on certain choreographers working in England at that time, notably Kenneth MacMillan and John Cranko. They moved in the Bolshoi direction, and many others followed them. When, in today's ballet, you see a man express his feelings for his lady by hurling her into the air, catching her upside down, and wrapping her around his neck like a pashmina, you are seeing the legacy of the Bolshoi. When, on the other hand, you see a woman in a leotard merely hold the man's hand as she flashes her legs out in eighty-two fabulous, clean ballet steps, and then, in a change of heart, fall into his arms and do something hair-raisingly sexy, like a front-facing split, you are seeing a child of "Agon."

Wheeldon shows both influences. When he was at the Royal Ballet, he worked with MacMillan. Accordingly, he can operate in the post-Bolshoi manner. That's what got people talking about him in the first place: the heated, elastic pas de deux that he made for his favorite couple at New York City Ballet, Wendy Whelan and Jock Soto, in "Polyphonia" (2001) and "After the Rain" (2005). "Polyphonia" was revived in Morphoses' new season, and I was glad to see it again, especially the pas de deux, which, unlike many other inheritors of Bolshoi theatrics, seems to convey a true emotion, an involving passion. (Wheeldon and Soto were a couple at the time the ballet was made.) But I hadn't remembered that this is the only part of "Polyphonia" that is in the heavy-breathing manner. The remaining eight sections are not son-of-Bolshoi but son-of-"Agon," with emotions that have to be extrapolated, teased out, from a cooler, more precise kind of dancing. Indeed, in the first section, with four couples placed in an almost military formation and going through their paces, with no hugging, to a difficult étude by Ligeti, we are looking at something a lot like the opening of Balanchine's "Episodes," one of his most exact and "technical" passages of dancing.

That, I think, is what we should start noting in Wheeldon's work, his thorough mastery of the ballet technique and his willingness, much of the time, to let the steps carry the meaning. Or that was what we saw in the one new piece that he made for his company's recent season: "Commedia," to the suite that Stravinsky carved out of "Pulcinella," a ballet score he composed for Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in 1920. In a curtain speech, Wheeldon told the audience that, by using this music, he was paying tribute to the Ballets Russes (1909-29), which will have its centenary next year. Stravinsky's score, in turn, was a nod to the past, a set of variations on pieces by Giovanni Pergolesi. Stravinsky, in his 1962 book "Expositions and Developments," written with Robert Craft, recalled that when Diaghilev suggested to him that he turn to Pergolesi, he, Stravinsky—a proud modernist—wanted no part of such eighteenth-century prettiness. But when he read the music he fell in love. Working on Pergolesi, he said, solidified his dedication to classicism. More than that, it showed him the extent to which he had always been a classicist without realizing it. "'Pulcinella,'" he wrote, was a backward look, "but it was a look in the mirror, too."

A similar revelation seems to hang over Wheeldon's "Commedia." He has made many self-consciously up-to-date ballets, but in this new piece he seems to admit, gladly, how much he owes to ballet history. As its title declares, "Commedia" is about the commedia dell'arte, that form of improvisational theatre, with Harlequin and Pierrot and Columbine, which was so important in Europe from the sixteenth century through the nineteenth and is less important—indeed, widely unknown—today. Wheeldon doesn't try to tell us who Harlequin and Pierrot are, but he does reintroduce us to the classical steps that are as much his heritage as the commedia was Stravinsky's and Pergolesi's. In one solo, he has a man, Rory Hohenstein, perform just about every allegro step in the ballet lexicon. Immediately afterward comes a duet in which Leanne Benjamin and Edward Watson do everything that Hohenstein, because his number was a solo, left out—low lifts and high lifts, chasings and capturings. Into every phrase are tucked all the refinements, all the little flicks and darts and hesitations and grace notes, that the *danse d'école* can offer. "Commedia" is a kind of syllabus of the academic ballet technique.



Wheeldon's new piece, "Commedia," set to a score by Stravinsky, is a tribute to Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.

RACHEL DUMM

At the same time, it is an expression of an unfamiliar emotion, and this is another side of Wheeldon that seems more obvious now than it did in the past. I probably should have seen it in the past. The feelings contained in those bendy pas de deux of his were not your standard stage love. They were murkier, darker—spoken and withheld at the same time. Likewise, the feelings expressed in "Commedia" are not entirely clear. While that packed solo and its sister duet convey states of mind that we know—cleverness, hilarity, play—other sections contain a note of the sinister. At the beginning of the ballet, two dancers, in unison, point offstage, with black-gloved hands. They know something we don't. Likewise, at the end, the entire cast of eight dancers crowd together and do something extremely fancy with their hands—curly, snaky gestures. The lighting changes, silhouetting them against the backdrop as they do this strange, mannered hand dance. They seem like a secret society, which we can watch but not penetrate.

Here, I think, we need to remember another choreographer from Wheeldon's past: Frederick Ashton, who preceded MacMillan as artistic director of the Royal and whose work Wheeldon danced in that company. Unlike MacMillan, Ashton made no sharp break with ballet history, but he was the greater artist. And, like Balanchine, he was in love with the academic technique, passionate about the steps, which he wanted done clearly, legibly, without blur or smear. But he differed from Balanchine, not to speak of the melodramatic MacMillan, in that he often interested himself in remote, mixed emotions: the melancholy love, the starlit spell, the holy calm. We don't have to guess whether Wheeldon feels a debt to Ashton. On Morphoses' program this year, he included Ashton's 1966 "Monotones II," a hushed dance, to Satie's equally hushed "Trois Gymnopédies," for what seem to be three moonwalkers. No one has ever known quite what to make of this gorgeous piece, but Wheeldon realized that it was part of him, and put it in his show. It stood there like a blessing from the past.

Wheeldon has said that he wants Morphoses to be a repertory company, presenting new works not just by him but by others as well, and this year, as he announced happily in his curtain speech, the troupe was able to commission its first ballet: "Six Fold Illuminate," by Emily Molnar, a graduate of William Forsythe's Frankfurt troupe. The piece followed the old "Agon" formula, but crossed with the Forsythe-ballet formula—that is, cold, relentless, and repetitive. Its score, being by Steve Reich (his "Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards"), was also repetitive, but Reich's repetitions contain—indeed, stress—development. Molnar's ballet had none of that. It started, it lasted, and, finally, it went away. It is generous of Wheeldon to want to share his stage with other choreographers, but he is going to have trouble finding someone on his level. ♦

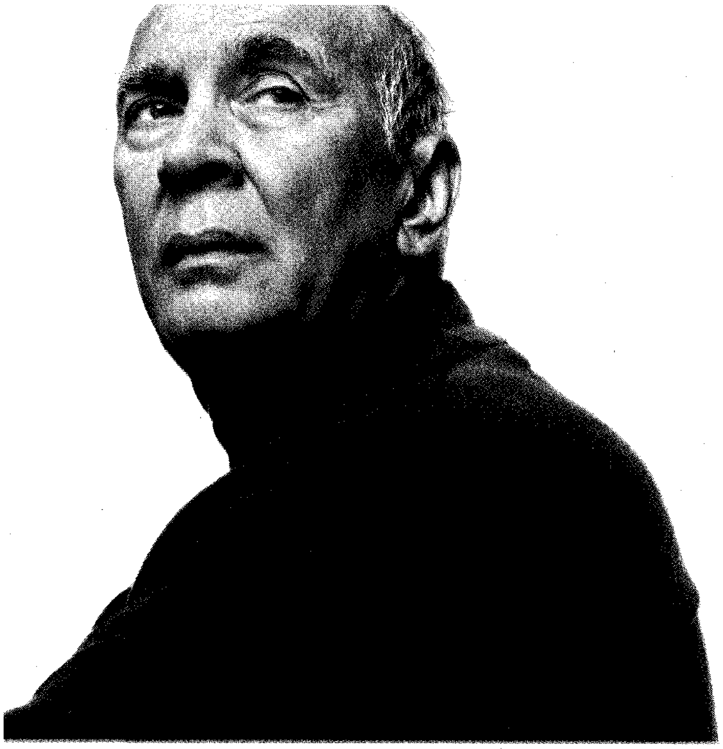
THE THEATRE

SAINTS AND SINNERS

Martyrdom and marriage onstage.

BY JOHN LAHR

In Robert Bolt's 1960 hit "A Man for All Seasons" (now in a Roundabout Theatre Company revival, at the American Airlines, under the direction of Doug Hughes), Cardinal Wolsey (Dakin Matthews) asks Sir Thomas More (Frank Langella) a question that is meant to wrong-foot him. "Take you altogether, Thomas, your scholarship, your experience, what are you?" he says. More can't answer, but I can. He's a cartoon. Before the play begins, a large pen-and-ink drawing of More and his extended family hangs over the stage; once the screen flies up and the plot and the dialogue kick in, the image quickly proves to be an apt metaphor for the play's sketchiness. Even the wooden beams and struts of the skeletal set, by Santo Loquasto, which divide the stage into large squares, contribute to the sense that "A Man for All Seasons," with its broad, garish narrative strokes, is a kind of classic comic book.



Frank Langella in "A Man for All Seasons." Photograph by Platon.

Bolt, who began his career as a history and literature teacher at a fashionable English boarding school, spins his yarn as if he were trying to make history accessible to nincompoops. He reduces the tumult of the English Reformation to a domestic drama about a good guy with strong feelings about divorce who tangles with a king who wants an heir. Caricature, not character, is the play's idiom. Although Bolt uses Erasmus' famous encomium about More as a title, he is uninterested in complexity, and certainly unable to demonstrate it. More (1477-1535, canonized 1935), in addition to being a fine legal mind, an author, a philosopher, and a statesman, was a man of vigorous vernacular wit, whom C. S. Lewis called "our first great cockney humorist." (Before his beheading, More blindfolded himself, and he departed this life with a handful of good lines, including a wisecrack to the lieutenant who led him to the scaffold on Tower Hill: "See me safe up, and for my coming down let me shift for myself.")

The play refers to More as the "English Socrates," but none of his humanistic panache is on display here. Bolt is portentous without being penetrating. In this exercise in hagiography, the saintly Sir Thomas has no flaws, no appetites, and no depth. He is always wise, always modest, always decent. When More, a devout Catholic, is sassed by his Lutheran would-be son-in-law, William Roper (Michael Esper), who calls Catholicism "a heretic church"—in real life, More condemned men to be burned at the stake for expressing such views—he responds with some benevolent teasing and sends the suitor away. "As long as he's a heretic, Meg, that's absolute," More tells his daughter as he puts the kibosh on her marital prospects. "Nice boy," he adds, turning from stern to fuzzy, a sort of Reformation Ozzie Nelson. His humility is equally comical. "Let me draw your attention to a fact—I'm *not* God," More says, when he refuses to have a man arrested on suspicion of spying. "But in the thickets of the law, oh, there I'm a forester. I doubt if there's a man alive who could follow me there, thank God."

"A Man for All Seasons" focusses on the legalistic tightrope that More walks between his king and his God. "I stand on the wrong side of no statute, and no common law," he tells his wife, who fears for his life once Henry VIII (Patrick Page) decides to wage war on the Pope and declare himself the Supreme Head of the Church in England. "On any of these matters have you heard me make a statement?" More asks his family, viewing silence as his "life line." When his belief in the apostolic succession of the Pope threatens to ruin him, he takes refuge in reason and the law. "It's a theory, yes; you can't see it; can't touch it; it's a theory," he tells his friend the Duke of Norfolk. "But what matters to me is not whether it's true or not but that I believe it to be true, or, rather, not that I *believe* it but that *I* believe it. I trust I make myself obscure."

The writing is best in the play's later scenes, when More deploys his legal cunning to help him weasel out of a political trap set by the oleaginous Thomas Cromwell (Zach Grenier), who is intent on advancing his own career by doing the King's bidding. More will not sign the Act of Supremacy—a piece of legislation that, as Bolt said in an exchange with Kenneth Tynan, "showed how the appointed guardians of society were ready to crack it open and let anarchy in to maintain their own advantage"—and Bolt gives More, on trial for treason, a fine, ringing summation of the Court's injustice: "I do none harm, I say none harm, I think none harm. And if this be not enough to keep a man alive, then in good faith I long not to live." Bolt cannot, however, top his hero's actual exit line (which he doesn't use in the play). More went to his death, as he said on the scaffold, "the King's good servant and God's first."

As More, Frank Langella lets virtuosity substitute for humanity. More's love is for his soul ("A man's soul is his self," he says); Langella's love is for his sound. He cants, he booms, he confides. It's a seductive, even imposing, display, whose command rushes the audience swiftly past any ideas. More had gravitas; Langella has grandiosity. With his external playing, he can't connect to More's scrupulous internal rigor. Whether he's inspecting a silver goblet, holding his cuffs to slip into his robe, or fiddling with his fingers as he reads a book, Langella's decorative filigrees of gesture telegraph vanity, not spirituality, making him, more precisely, a ham for all seasons.

"A Man for All Seasons" turns the extraordinary into the ordinary. Michael Weller's "Fifty Words" (well directed by Austin Pendleton, at the Lucille Lortel) turns an ordinary marital quarrel into an extraordinary debacle. For ninety minutes, Adam (Norbert Leo Butz) and Jan (Elizabeth Marvel) go at it in their designer kitchen, while their troubled nine-year-old son, Greg, is away on his first overnight trip. Jan has an Internet business on the rise; Adam is an architect in a slump. She wants solitude, he wants intimacy; the result—war. The obbligato of recrimination is played with fierce, eye-popping authority by both actors. All the familiar ammunition explodes around us—flying food, packed bags, makeup sex, extramarital revelations, murderous oaths—but it's the psychic climate beneath Weller's pyrotechnics that is his real achievement.

This is the first night in nearly a decade that the couple have spent alone, but it's clear from Jan's self-absorption and snarkiness that there is no space for Adam in her mind. His show of bonhomie, his efforts to flatter, to cajole, to please, to live up to his wife's expectations are bad-faith maneuvers, attempts to placate both Jan's hatred and his own. And the hatred comes out.

Sometimes, as the couple peck away at each other like pigeons on a ledge, Weller spins plumes of laughter out of the ambivalence. "I hate how you approach halfway, then linger on the sidelines all patient and kind, watching out for my needs," Jan tells Adam, adding, "Ravage me, give me no choice for Christ's sake." "You hate that," he replies. Jan counters, "So what? I love it, too." But in the arsenic hours of early morning, when it looks as though their fractious marriage is over, the unspoken finds voice. Jan admits her real feelings about motherhood:

> I knew I'd hate it. I knew I'd be bad at it. I hate how important it is to you, I hate that I took on something I wouldn't do well because I can't stand to do anything less than perfectly, that's how I'm made, and most of all I hate knowing, and I do know this, I've always known I did it because if I hadn't, I'd lose you. . . . And then I hate you for making me bring a life into the world that has to grow up knowing his mother wishes he didn't exist.

Despite a few melodramatic plot points, Weller's smart, muscular writing manages to ratchet up the emotional stakes. Will Adam leave Jan? What will become of the attention-deprived Greg? Will they stick together? "Fifty Words" submerges the audience in the mysteries of human connection. If the play reaches a conclusion about anything, it is that the greatest show on earth is the show of emotion. ♦

CORRECTION OF THE WEEK

From the Times.

A film review on Sept. 5 about "Save Me" confused some characters and actors. It is Mark, not Chad, who is sent to the Genesis House retreat for converting gay men to heterosexuality. (Mark is played by Chad Allen; there is no character named Chad.) The hunky fellow resident is Scott (played by Robert Gant), not Ted (Stephen Lang). And it is Mark and Scott—not "Chad and Ted"—who partake of cigarettes and "furtive man-on-man action."

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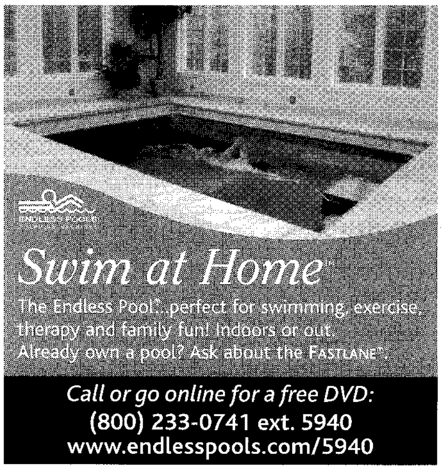

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

INSIDE JOBS

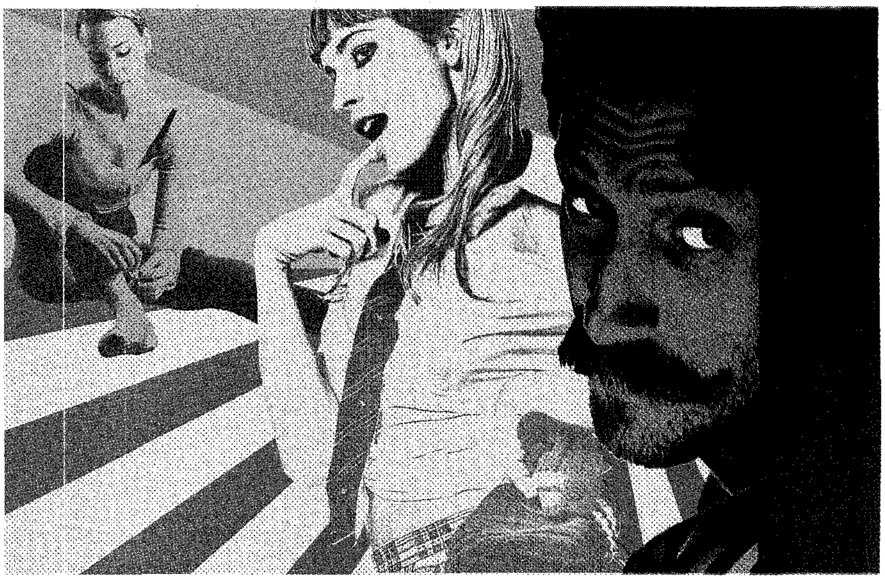
"Filth and Wisdom," "RocknRolla," and "What Just Happened?"

BY ANTHONY LANE

There have been countless occasions on which a husband and wife have acted together onscreen. A pair of mating movie directors, however, is altogether a more exotic find, and, as for both having a film released in the same month, it's almost unheard of. "Wanda," for instance, Barbara Loden's impressive début behind the camera, came out in 1970, in a lull between two films directed by her husband, Elia Kazan. No such staggering of duties in the Ritchie household: American audiences will shortly be able to savor not only Guy Ritchie's "RocknRolla" but also "Filth and Wisdom," directed by Madonna, his better half.

I use the word "better" in the chivalric sense, pointing to the greater moral refinement of womankind. To imply that Mrs. Ritchie also has the edge on Mr. Ritchie in her skills as an auteur would, I feel, demand gallantry of a higher order. Madonna is, of course, an actress of wide repute; the nights on which I saw "Shanghai Surprise" and "Body of Evidence" could not be more memorable if they had been seared onto my flanks with a branding iron. She has even been a leading lady for her beloved, taking the central, or swimsuit, role in his 2002 masterwork, "Swept Away." Like Ingmar Bergman's "Persona," this revolved around the loggerheads of two people stuck on a lonely island, although there, it must be said, the resemblance ends. Now Madonna, following her husband's example, has made a movie for herself.

Both films are set in London, the city where the Ritchies live. The fact that, as represented in their works, it bears almost no relation to the place where most Londoners reside is, in itself, no cause for rebuke. Madonnaville is perhaps a touch more recognizable than Ritchietown, in that it contains a pharmacy, a restaurant, and other components of a normal existence. The pharmacy is run by Sardeep (Inder Manocha), a middle-aged Indian in love with his assistant, Juliette (Vicky McClure), who likes to steal drugs off the shelves. Her home is an apartment shared with a dancer, Holly (Holly Weston), who graduates from ballet class to strip joint. Their landlord, Andriy (Eugene Hutz), earns cash by providing fetishistic services with bridles and whips. Given that most of us were already tired of Madonna's shock tactics in "Sex," sixteen years ago, it is unlikely that we would be thrown, let alone aroused, by the erotic fripperies of her film, or by the camera's sad ogling of Holly as she writhes around a pole. In case you find these disparate strands confusing, Eugene Hutz is on hand to lurch out of character and address the camera directly. Wild of voice and limb, he is the gangling Ukrainian front man of a band called Gogol Bordello, dispensers of so-called gypsy punk to the discerning few. This is his third film, believe it or not, and the question is not whether he can act—which he can't—but whether he would please, for once, just sit still and shut up.



Holly Weston, as a dancer and as a stripper, and Eugene Hutz in Madonna's movie.

SEAN MCCABE

What vexes me most about "Filth and Wisdom" is the economics. Madonna has been a global star for decades. She has amassed a fortune, much of which presumably remains intact. She can't have spent *all* of it on jodhpurs and conical bras. So why, when it came to launching herself as a film director, did she limit her budget to $365.23? Such, at any rate, is my estimate for the funding of "Filth and Wisdom." If the actors were paid according to their talents, they cannot have cost more than forty bucks. In the case of Richard E. Grant, the one sizable name in the cast, his performance as a tweedy, sightless poet is so embarrassing that I trust he took no payment at all. The only major expense was the lighting: a toy flashlight, I would guess, placed carefully in the corner of each room and angled upward—hence the capering shadows that Andriy casts on his living-room walls. In technical terms, more professional productions than this are filmed and cut on iMovie, by ten-year-olds, a thousand times a day.

"RocknRolla," by contrast, has competence on its side. Whole scenes go by in which one shot actually matches the next. In place of the bleak fuzz that veils half the setups in "Filth and Wisdom," the images here are crisply defined, even if Ritchie has proved unable to shed the fondness for muted mud-tones that graced "Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels." Why, there are even proper actors! Giving reasonable performances! This film's got *everything*, although purists might quibble that it lacks any sliver of plausibility or dramatic interest. It stars Gerard Butler—rugged, wry, and, ever since "300," trembling on the verge of stardom, though I worry that he may never recover from the trauma of having stormed into battle wearing a Spartan diaper. He plays One Two, a gangster—small fry, unlike Lenny (Tom Wilkinson), a gangster of substance, although even *he* meets his match in Uri (Karel Roden), a Russian billionaire who is really, when you come down to it, a gangster. There may be other careers in Ritchietown, but we never see them. The plot, such as it is, entails men owing each other money. Sometimes, for a laugh, they steal it.

What links this film to "Filth and Wisdom" is that both are the products of what might be called the wannabe imagination—a desperate wish to dream yourself down from on high, from within the fortress of fame, and to scrape acquaintance with the rougher end of the culture. If "RocknRolla" clings to the company of ne'er-do-wells, it's not because they bristle with the frustrations of society, as Warner Bros. gangsters did in the nineteen-thirties, but purely because Ritchie wants to borrow their cheeky charm—a virtue that, in reality, none of them possess. Meanwhile, Madonna's mess of a movie grabs at the rub and rancor of multiculturalism, which it proceeds to squash into a litter of clichés, or, more simply, insults. We get the hectoring Indian wife, besieged with children, followed by the hectoring Jewish wife, clad in curlers at breakfast and gold jewelry for the rest of the day, and married to a weak and masochistic property developer named Goldfarb (Elliot Levey). I may be missing something here, but, if you're going to profess an interest in Jewish mysticism, as Madonna the Kabbalist has done, it may not be a terribly good idea to create a scene in which a Jewish man pays to be beaten by a Ukrainian and addressed as Rothschild. Why did Mr. Ritchie not warn Mrs. Ritchie about this, as they sat around in their lovely gangsterless home, comparing notes on filmmaking? Could it be that he feared a right old hectoring? We will never know.

In the new Barry Levinson film, "What Just Happened?," Robert De Niro plays a producer, but, as with the uniform of dark blazer and slacks that the job demands, there's something uneasy about the fit. De Niro is driven enough, but the drive has never expressed itself in garrulity, still less in smooth talk, and his great rages, in the past, have welled up from dreads and thwartings that really matter—the ones that carry weight in a man's soul—whereas the whole gist of Ben, this new character, is that he has wasted his energy on nonsense.

The story is written by Art Linson, himself a producer, and is based on his own book of the same name, which in turn was based on his years of Hollywood tribulation. From the start, we find Ben neck-deep in quandaries, not all of his own devising. Various figures complicate his days. There is Kelly (Robin Wright Penn), one of his ex-wives, with whom he remains on dangerously good terms; there is Bruce Willis, playing a choleric and bush-bearded version of himself; there is Dick (John Turturro), Willis's agent, and the plaything of a nervous stomach; there is the smug writer (Stanley Tucci), the icy studio head (Catherine Keener), and the hot director (Michael Wincott), who is drunken, eccentric, and profane—in a word, British. The performance that strikes deepest, however, is from Lindy Booth; she gets one short scene, as a hostess in a restaurant who is asked to read aloud a letter addressed to Ben, from someone who can't make lunch. She is an ordinary woman, outside the charmed circle of the movies, and her dismay and shame at having to recite a litany of brutish oaths tells us all we need to know about the life within it.

"What Just Happened?" is deliberately dizzying to the eye. Los Angeles, after dark, becomes a smarting flare of neon and tail-lights, and Levinson even pulls the futile trick of speeding up his film to indicate an unstoppable world. One wonders what the younger Levinson, the guy who made "Diner"—that feast of naturally quick spirits—would make of this later effort, or of the dialogue that lumbers through it. "Let's just say that my power credentials were on the line, big time," Ben says, in voice-over. That is small-time language, by Levinson's standards, and the hero himself feels underpowered. It remains to be seen whether audiences will have the time or the inclination, just now, to sympathize with the stresses that beset a Hollywood producer and his pals. Levinson has assembled a fine field of actors, no question, but the going is too easy for them underfoot; movies about movies are old ground, and what could be sweeter—cozier, even—than trampling on the follies of your trade, knowing that nothing will ever change? ♦

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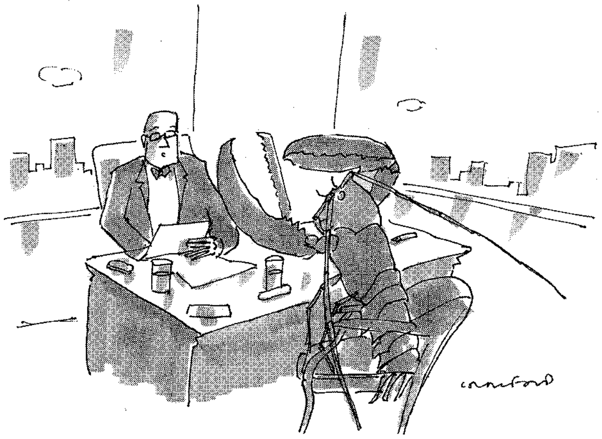
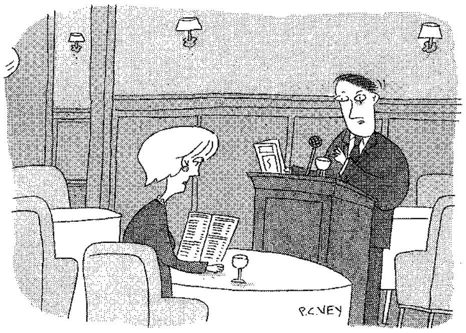
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Mick Stevens, must be received by Sunday, October 19th. Finalists in the October 6th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the November 3rd issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"So why did you leave Red Lobster?"
Paul Vogel, Arlington, Va.



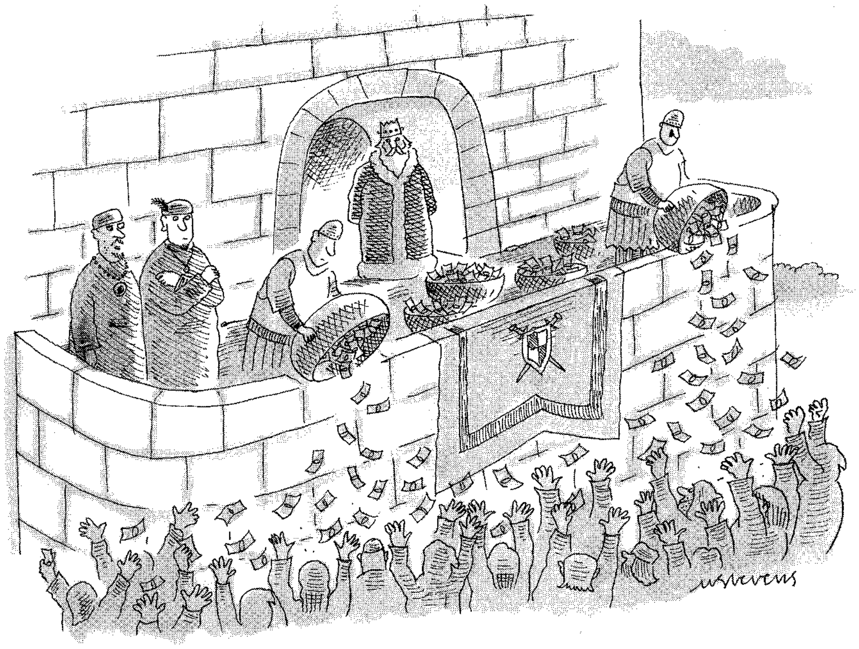
THE FINALISTS

"The ratatouille is good today. I am the owner and I approve this message."
Jean Pyle, Hawthorne, N.J.

"What's your stance on first-date sex? You have two minutes to respond."
Frank Campanella, New York City

"And, if you elect me, all Americans will be able to choose soup and salad!"
Peter LaMassa, Massapequa Park, N.Y.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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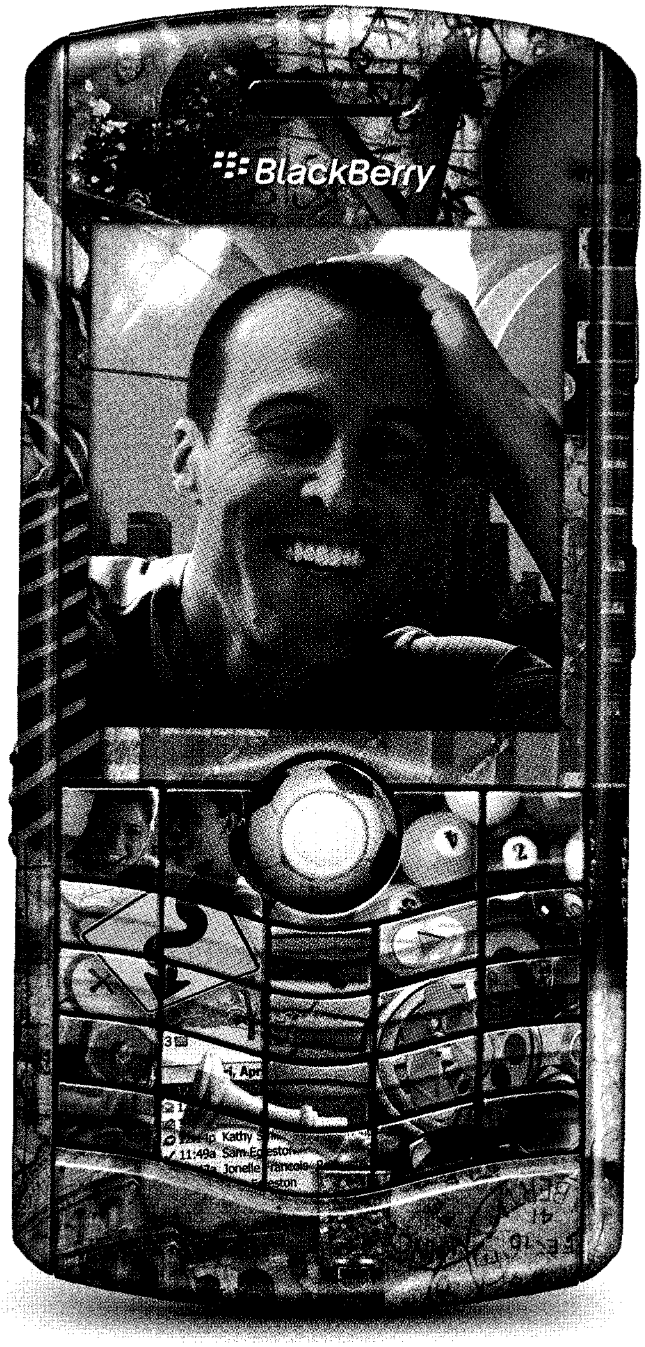
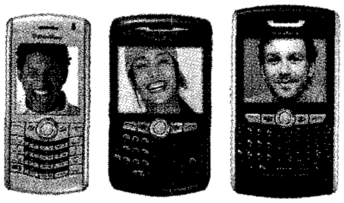
Life On BlackBerry





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